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THE BATTLE OF SUKCHON-SUNCHON

DEFENSIVE, ENCIRCLED FORCES,

ALLIED FORCES: 187TH AIRBORNE, RCT

ENEMY FORCES: NORTH KOREAN, 239th RGT

20 - 25 OCTOBER, 1950

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20. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number) In October 1950, the 187th Airborne RCT staged a model airborne assault on the North Korean towns, of Sukchon and Sunchon, with the objective of intercepting retreating North Korean forces and UN POW's. The American forces at Sukchon came under heavy attack from the North Korean 239th Regiment until the British 27th Brigade, leading the UN ground advance, relieved the airborne forces. Although the airborne drop itself was a success, the operation came too late to intercept any other North Korean elements.		

COMMON REFERENCE: Sukchon-Sunchon

TYPE OPERATION: Defensive, Encircled Forces

OPPOSING FORCES: Allied: 187th Airborne, RCT

North Korean: 239th Regiment

SYNOPSIS:

On 20 October 1950, the 187th Airborne RCT staged a model airborne assault on the town of Sukchon and Sunchon, located approximately twenty miles north of P'yongyang, the capital of North Korea. The objective was to intercept North Korean military forces, government officials, and UN POW's retreating in front of the U.S. I Corps' northward advance. For the first time, heavy equipment such as 105mm howitzers and trucks were included in a parachute drop. The 2nd Battalion, landing at Sunchon, met little resistance and linked up almost immediately with UN ground elements. The 1st and 3rd Battalion at Sukchon came under heavy attack from the North Korean 239th Regiment which was fighting its way north. The 3rd Battalion was hard pressed until the British 27th Brigade, leading the UN advance, took the 239th from the rear and relieved the airborne forces. Although the airborne drop itself was a success, the operation came too late to intercept any other major North Korean elements.

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Out of the Sky, by Michael Hickey.

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I. INTRODUCTION TO THE BATTLE OF SUKCHON-SUNCHON

At 1400 hours on 20 October 1950, the 187th Regimental Combat Team (RCT) conducted an airborne assault on the towns of Sukchon and Sunchon, located approximately 20 miles north of P'yongyang, the capitol of North Korea. MacArthur, with his UN Forces in pursuit of the North Koreans across the 38th parallel, had decided to use this airborne force in an attempt to cut the enemy's main escape route. The 187th RCT's mission was to intercept North Korean military forces and government officials, and to rescue US Prisoners of War (POWs) being evacuated out of P'yongyang.

1st Battalion was to clear Sukchon and to hold the high ground to the north. 3rd Battalion was to block the road and railroad just south of Sukchon. The 2nd Battalion was to clear the town of Sunchon, approximately 15 kilometers east of Sukchon, and to capture the train. The 2nd Battalion met little resistance and linked up very quickly with advancing UN ground elements. Weather delays caused them to miss a train carrying NK officials and U.N. POWs, however, by a matter of hours.

The 1st and 3rd Battalions at Sukchon met heavier resistance from elements of the rear guard North Korean 239th Regiment skillfully fighting its way north in a series of delaying actions. The 3rd Battalion, after moving cautiously south, faced heavy odds of the determined enemy force in fierce close quarters combat on the night of 21 and 22 October.

The main allied advance from the south, lead by the 27th British Commonwealth Brigade, closed on the rear of the North Korean 239th Regiment on the morning of 22 October 1950. More fierce combat, to include bayonet and hand-to-hand fighting, took place between the Australians and the North Koreans. By noon, friendly contact

had been made, and the airborne force was relieved. The airborne drop itself was successful, but came to late to intercept any other major North Korean forces.

Excellent sources are available for the analysis of this battle. These include the Regimental History, daily staff journals and logs, and the actual operations orders, annexes, overlays, and unit after action reports. The 187th RCT Association, RAKKASANS, was contacted for possible oral history interviews.

II. THE STRATEGIC SETTING

A. GENERAL (See Map 1)

The Sukchon-Sunchon battle occurred in the early years of the atomic age approximately five years after the first nuclear weapons helped bring the Second World War to an abrupt halt. From 1945 on, the United States slowly built a stockpile of nuclear weapons, which, by 1950, had grown to about eighty such devices. In September, 1949, the Soviet Union detonated their first nuclear weapon; however, by the time of the Sukchon-Sunchon operation, only the United States had the capability to launch nuclear strikes.

Although this era was defined as the genitus of the atomic age, the massive destructiveness of nuclear bombs made their use extremely controversial. Thus the possibility that President Harry S. Truman, who had ordered their use against Japan, would authorize their use in Korea was remote. Instead the war was dominated by conventional weapons and tactics.

Many U.S. commanders, battalion level and higher, had fought in the Second World War; therefore, they relied on World War II experience to dictate how to fight in Korea. General Douglas MacArthur, for example, was greatly influenced by his experience in WW II. Clearly MacArthur used his "hit 'em where they ain't" strategy as demonstrated in the Inchon landing. MacArthur also employed airborne forces in the Pacific during World War II at Nadzab, Noemfoor, Corregidor, and Appari. His appreciation of specialized airborne capability encouraged their use at Sukchon-Sunchon to cut off the enemy's retreat and to link up with friendly forces.

The major antagonists in the Korean War were the North Koreans (NK) or the Democratic Peoples Republic of the Korea, who were sponsored by the Soviet Union (USSR) and the Peoples Republic of China (PRC), and the South Koreans or the Republic of Korea (ROK), backed by the United Nations, primarily the United States.

The principal war aim of the North Koreans was to unite all of the Korean Peninsula under their rule through force. The ROK aim was to prevent this unification effort.

Since the successful Xth Corps Inchon landing in mid September, 1950, and the concurrent 8th Army breakout and pursuit from the Pusan Perimeter, United Nations forces pursued NK forces toward their capitol, P'yongyang. But before crossing the 38th Parallel to seize P'yongyang, a major strategic decision was made. On September 27, 1950 the JCS sent General MacArthur an order which stated "your military objective is the destruction of the North Korean armed forces. In attaining this objective you are authorized to conduct military operations, including amphibious and airborne landings or ground operations north of the 38th Parallel in Korea."¹

By this time, three-fourths of the NK army had been destroyed. The Xth Corps "anvil" and the 8th Army "hammer" had been successful; however, the remaining quarter of the NK army escaped northward through the Taebaek Mountains and up the east coast.

MacArthur now planned to destroy NK forces through a double envelopment. He planned for the Xth Corps to conduct another amphibious assault, this time on the east coast of Korea at Wonsan. At the same time he planned for the 8th Army to advance toward P'yongyang via Kaesong and Sariwon. At an opportune time, the 8th Army and Xth Corps would attack toward each other via the Wonsan-P'yongyang corridor to envelop NK forces.

MacArthur's plan was altered due to the early successes on both sides of the Peninsula. First, on the east side, the ROK I Corps advanced rapidly in early October and secured Wonsan and then Hungnam in just sixteen days. With both of these ports secure, the significance of a Xth Corps amphibious operation diminished. Even if factually and operationally feasible, Xth Corps' landings would have been delayed because of the late discovery of 3000 mines in Wonsan harbor and loading-

out difficulties experienced by Xth Corps' 1st Marine Division at the contested port of Inchon.

From an operational view MacArthur planned to follow up the 8th Army successes in the west and center of Korea by advancing northward, stopping about forty miles south of the Manchurian border and almost 100 miles from the Russian frontier on the east coast. As a part of this offensive strategy, on October 17, 1950, MacArthur's United Nations Command Operations Order No. 4 to initiate what "hopefully, would be the final phase of the war."² The order called for an airdrop of the 187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team north of P'yongyang and forward of the US I Corps to block retreating NK forces and to link up with US forces attacking from the south. After the 187th RCT assisted the Xth Corps in clearing the southern bank of the Han River in the battle for Seoul, it had been GHQ reserve, located at Kimpo Airfield.

The root cause of the Korean conflict was the NK insistence on unifying Korea under Communist rule and its subsequent attack southward to gain this political objective through military means.

Conversely, the United Nations, with the preponderance of forces made up by the ROK and the US, saw the conflict in opposite terms. They were attacked by the perpetrators of armed aggression; therefore, their initial objective became the elimination of that hostile force. A subsequent objective became the eradication of the NK forces so they could not wage war in the future. This subsequent objective became the rationale for crossing the 38th Parallel.

B. THE PRINCIPAL ANTAGONISTS.

Probably the most influential factor of the Korean War was the political situation. Since the defeat of the Axis Powers by the Allies in 1945 and the split of the Allies between East and West, the Korean War became the first armed struggle between the forces of Communism and the free-world. The Korean War was an ideological struggle from the outset due to the NK claim to represent all of the people of Korea, not just those north of the 38th Parallel. The United Nations forces felt that they were freeing South Korea of Communist oppressors. The influence of these political ideologies on the Sukchon-Sunchon battle are difficult to measure; however, it can be surmised that ideological fervor contributed to the emotional intensity of the war.

The most influential technological factor of the Sukchon-Sunchon operation involved the delivery means for deployment of paratroopers and their equipment. During WW II, paratroopers jumped from C-46 or C-47 cargo aircraft. Small equipment bundles, known as door bundles, which held such items as machineguns, radios and additional ammunition, were released before or after the soldiers jumped from the aircraft. Larger pieces of equipment such as small howitzers and jeeps, were deployed in gliders. Following WW II, the Army and Air Force developed methods of parachuting these larger items into a drop zone. The primary catalyst for the change from gliders to heavy drop, was advances in aviation technology demonstrated in the design and fielding of the C-119 "FLYING BOXCAR," a cargo aircraft much larger than the C-46 and C-47s of WWII. The C-119's removable rear door made it ideal for quick on-loading and efficient heavy drop.

C. MILITARY SYSTEMS AND PREVIOUS PERFORMANCE

At the beginning of hostilities, the opposing forces on the Korean Peninsula were dissimilar. The Korean Peoples Army was vastly superior to their southern

counterparts in nearly every category of waging war. An explanation for this disparity follows.

By 1950, NK found itself with a well-trained and well-equipped army thanks to logistical and advisory assistance from the Soviet Union. The North Korean Army comprised 135,000 soldiers organized into infantry, mechanized infantry, and border constabulary units. The Soviets supplied the NKs with large quantities of heavy artillery, T-34 tanks, trucks, automatic weapons, and 180 new aircraft. The NKPA was organized into eight full strength infantry divisions, two more divisions at half-strength, a motorcycle reconnaissance regiment, an armored brigade, and five brigades of the border constabulary. Each division had approximately fifteen Soviet Army advisors. Not only was the NKPA well-manned and well-equipped, but their leadership also consisted of many who had fought with Russian and the Chinese Communists during the Second World War.

A sharp contrast existed south of the 38th Parallel. The ROK police force (it did not even take on the name of the Army) lacked adequate training, leadership and equipment. Although the U.S. provided a small advisory team, by the outbreak of hostilities in 1950, the ROK found itself with few people trained in how to conduct modern warfare. Compounding doctrinal, equipment and training problems, few American advisors spoke Korean and few Koreans spoke English. Further problems included: many US military terms did not have a Korean translation, many ROK officers were political appointees, and many ROK troops were dispersed throughout the country conducting antibanditry missions. Fewer than half of ROK battalions (the ROK had 67 understrength battalions by 1950) passed their training tests in 1949. The 65,000 man police force had no heavy artillery, tanks and anti-tank weapons, or air power. Concurrently, the US forces including those stationed in Japan, charged with the protection of the ROK when NK attacked in June of 1950, had been steadily demobilizing. The once powerful US war machine found

itself with a Navy short of combat ships, amphibious craft of all types, and minesweepers. The Air Force initially had no jet fighters, was short of conventional aircraft and troop carriers, and had a reduced capability for photo-reconnaissance. US units stationed in Japan and the US generally were neither well trained nor well equipped. Further, divisional force structure developed for the European battlefield proved insufficient for war in Korea. This insufficiency was compounded by undermanned units.

The reasons for the poor ROK and US military situations were many. Korea, for example, had been excluded from the US defensive perimeter in official governmental communiqus. The United States was completely committed to the theory that the next war after WWII would be global, therefore attaching only minor importance to Korea. The main threat was considered to be the Soviet Union in Europe. Further, the term "**limited warfare**" had not yet entered the lexicon of U.S. military planners. The atomic bomb had created a psychological "**Maginot Line**" for the US defense community. All of these factors added up to a significant state of unpreparedness when the NK Army attacked across the 38th Parallel in June of 1950. By September of 1950, however, the military strength of the US had improved somewhat through rethinking doctrine and providing commanders with the men and material needed to conduct successful combat operations.

III. THE TACTICAL SITUATION

A. GENERAL.

SUMMARY OF THE SITUATION

1. The following extracts, taken from 187th RCT Operations Report for Sukchon-Sunchon, Korea dated 20 October, 1950³, comprise an actual summary of the situation in 1950:

In accordance with a resolution of the Security Council of the United Nations, approved 25 June 1950, the JCS directed CINCFE to provide the fullest possible military support to the ROK to clear SOUTH KOREA of NK Forces. Operations now in progress are accomplishing this objective. Upon completion of current operations, the 8th Army composed of I and IX Corps and I and II ROK Corps and all other UN ground contingents concentrates in the area north of SEOUL and south of the 38th Parallel with the exception of the ROK 1st Division and Capitol Division which are in the immediate vicinity of WONSAN. X Corps consisting of the 1st Marine and 7th Infantry Divisions and supporting combat and service troops as now assigned have withdrawn to the PUNSAN AREA for further operations as GHQ Reserve. The 187th RCT in the KIMPO AREA remains in GHQ Reserve.

2. While the military defeat of NK Forces in the ROK and their ejection therefrom might be considered to accomplish the immediate objectives of the United Nations, the enemy is successfully withdrawing some forces from the ROK. The existence of effective military forces north of the 38th Parallel may prevent the attainment of a lasting solution of the Korean problem which is acceptable to the United Nations. The UN Command, therefore, will conduct operations north of the 38th Parallel to complete the destruction of the Army of North Korea as an organized fighting force.

B. GENERAL ENEMY SITUATION IN KOREA IMMEDIATELY PRIOR TO THE
SUKCHON-SUNCHON AIRBONE OPERATION. (See Map 2)

1. GROUND. No organized North Korean Army Unit is currently known to be located north of the 38th Parallel. Available units existing prior to 25 June plus provisional units conscripted from CHINA, MANCHURIA and both NORTH and SOUTH KOREA have long since been committed in the abortive drive toward PUSAN and more recently in a desperate, though futile, effort to salvage a rapidly deteriorating situation in the South. Although there are no firm indications of the exsistence of NK Security Force Unites north of the 38th Parallel, it can be assumed that a limited number of such troops are being employed as line of communications troops along the most critical corridors of egress from the battle areas. Also to be considered are cadres and trainees which might well be available from the 12 well known replacement training centers. The 12 RCT's are estimated by G-2, GHQ, FEC, to have an estimated total capacity of 125,000 trainees who receive varying types and amounts of training. Due to sketchy information on the subject and as yet unknown results of recent intense UN bombardment of the Training Centers, no estimate can be made at this time of strength available from this source.

The bulk of the NK resistance to be encountered north of the 38th Parallel will be offered by retreating elements of remnants of both Security Force Units and combat units. Enemy combat forces who successfully disengage from contact with the exploiting UN Forces in the South are experiencing little or no opportunity to evacuate heavy equipment or supporting weapons with which to organize an effective defense.

To date, there has been no firm evidence of overt Chinese or Soviet troop participation; however, it has been established that CCF trained and equipped orientals of Korean ethnic origin have been fighting with NK Forces and, in some cases, have formed the trained nucleus of entire NK Divisions. The Chinese 4th

Field Army is believed to be massed on the Korean-Manchurian border. CCF Forces can be made available immediately in strength up to at least 100,000 if a decision is made to commit them in force.

It is estimated that at best the enemy can conduct only a limited defense north of the 38th Parallel with the equivalent of approximately four or five divisions lacking proper equipment, with poor organization, faltering leadership and plunging morale. This force may be backed up with, or more likely supplemented with miscellaneous security battalions at low combat efficiency. The meager equipment in possession of Security Forces and training units will not contribute materially to the defensive effort of the entire remaining NK military ensemble. The resistance potential of these remnant forces will increase only in direct proportion to the amount of material and personnel committed by the apparently reluctant CCF and the hesitant Soviet Union.

2. Air. The NK AF has been almost obliterated by UN air action and is capable only of sporadic surprise attacks on a very limited scale. The recent and continuing construction of new aircraft revestments and repair of existing shelters indicates either that the NK AF still anticipates reinforcements from some of the estimated 300 combat aircraft of the CCAF or that there has been a broken promised between the two Peoples Democracies. There also is always to be considered the powerful Soviet Air Force, units of which are conveniently based at Darien and in nearby North China.

C. Estimate of the Enemy Situation used for Sukchon and Sunchon Airborne operation in 187 RCT AO.

1. Assumption: That units now defending the approaches to P'YONGYANG and P'YONGYANG itself will be cut off in large measure by the drop of the 187th RCT and its subsequent link-up with ROKs from the east.

2. Enemy Situation:

- a. The enemy has rapidly withdrawn from positions along the 38th Parallel before the advance of 8th Army from the South and ROK units from the East to positions extending from SUNCHON to P'YONGYANG and thence to the west coast. Badly disorganized, low in morale, poorly equipped and harrassed by our fighters and bombers he has offered only sporadic resistance at key points on the main roads to P'YONGYANG. Since his supply lines are now shortened, prepared positions of a temporary nature are at his disposal and a sense of pride to defend the capitol will be inherent, it is to be expected that UN forces will meet with stiffening resistance around the Capitol and at SUNCHON, which prevents UN troops from extending their line to the west coast above P'YONGYANG and cutting off his supply, communications and avenues of approach.
- b. Finding airborne forces blocking his supply and communication lines from the north, he may launch desperation attacks via SUKCHON or SUNCHON to break though and re-establish the west coast corridor.
- c. To date, there have been no reports or indications of overt Chinese or Russian troop participation; however, there has been substantiated evidence of CCF trained and equipped Koreans fighting with NK

forces and some unconfirmed reports of CCF and USSR units in North Korean rear areas. In this connection, attention must be brought to focus on the CCF units of the Chinese 4th Field Army who have for a considerable period been reported to be massing on the Korean-Manchurian border. CCF forces can be made available in strength up to 100,000 immediately should a decision be made to employ them in Korea.

- d. Only sporadic enemy air attacks can be expected from the presently depleted NK Air Force. The possibility of open CCF assistance with its estimated strength of 200 combat planes must not be overlooked nor would it be advisable to give only cursory attention to the powerful USSR Air Force.
- e. Guerrilla activity may be expected to continue on an ever decreasing scale since it is estimated that little aid from the NKPA would be forthcoming.

3. Enemy Capabilities

- a. Limited defense at SUKCHON and SUNCHON.
- b. Guerrilla activity in UN occupied areas.
- c. Limited air action.
- d. Desperation counter-attacks to clear SUKCHON and main coast road north from P'YONGYANG.
- e. Reinforcement by CCF and/or USSR.

4. Conclusion: That the enemy can conduct a limited defense of SUKCHON and SUNCHON and that he will make sporadic desperation attacks to keep the west coast routes open to the north.

4. Summary of Enemy Situation 1. The North Korea force that opposed the 187th RCT was comprised of the 239th Infantry Regiment, which had approximately 2,500 personnel, and other small units consisting of approximately 3,500 personnel. North Korea weapons included: 120 mm mortars, 40 mm guns, 25 caliber Korean rifles, various caliber of artillery, light machineguns, 82 mm mortars, 14.5 mm anti-tank rifles.

2. The missions of the North Koreans were perceived as to conduct a limited defense of Sukchon and Sunchon, to keep the east coast routes open to the north, and to launch desperation attacks in the vicinity of Sukchon and Sunchon, and to break through and to re-establish the west coast corridor.

D. **TERRAIN ANALYSIS FOR AREA OF OPERATIONS** (The following extract is from Special Report #57⁴)

Ch'ongch'on-gang valley. This subregion includes the valleys of the lower Ch'ongch'on-gang and its tributaries, the lower Taeryong-gang and the lower Kuryong-gang. The lower Ch'ongch'on Valley extends about 50 miles northeast - southwest. Its lowland varies from about 3 to 20 miles in width. The valley flats are from 400 to 2,000 yards wide. They are not continuous on any one side of the stream, however, and may be restricted by steep hills coming close to the river. The valley of the Ch'ongch'on is fairly straight, but its two tributaries are extremely winding. Small side valleys, 1 to 5 miles long and 100 to 800 yards wide, provide alternate routes and limited room for deployment. All these valley areas are commanded by steep, 300 to 1,000-foot hills, partly covered with grass, scrub pine, and trees. Vehicular movement would be difficult in the hills. Terrain in the valleys favors operations except when rice fields are wet or during heavy summer rains. The main P'yongyang - Sinuiju route crosses the lower valley from Anju to near Pakch'on. This road crosses both the Ch'ongch'on and the Taeryong by ferry. The streams are about 200 yards wide at the crossings. Winding roads, probably suitable for

vehicles, go up the Ch'ongch'on and the tributary valleys, crossing to the Amnok-kang Valley over passes 1,600 to 2,300 feet high.

P'yongan-pukto Hills. The P'yongan-pukto Hills subregion includes an extensive area of hills and ridges between the Ch'ongch'on-gang Valley and the Lower Amnok-kang Valley. The subregion extends about 80 miles east-west and 65 miles north-south. It is an extension of the western end of the Northern Korean Highlands. The drainage of this subregion is mostly southward, however, while that of the Northern Korean Highlands is largely to the north. The relief of the subregion consists of narrow, winding gorges and valleys, overlooked by hills 500 to 3,000 feet high. These hills and ridges have no definite alignment. The terrain is not suitable for rapid deployment off the roadways except in a belt about 8 miles wide along the coast. Main valleys could be blocked. Tributary valleys become rocky gorges upstream and head in steep passes. Flat areas are not continuous on either side of the stream, so that it is frequently necessary to cross back and forth. Even in the less rugged area near the coast, existing routes wind to avoid the low, steep hills. Existing road and rail routes are parallel to the coast from Chongju toward Sinuiju and from Chongju to Sakchu and the Amnok Valley. These routes, especially the latter, could be blocked in numerous places.

Taedong-gang Valley. The Taedong-gang Valley is north of the Hwanghae-do Hills. It includes the lower valley of the Chaeryong-gang which empties into the Taedong-gang estuary. P'yongyang is located in this subregion. The subregion extends about 80 miles NE-SW and averages 15 miles wide. The Chaeryong-gang section is some 25 miles long N-S, and 15 miles wide. Both valleys are flat, extremely winding, and of variable width, changing suddenly at places from 2 to 5 miles of lowland on both sides to steep slopes of cliffs closely bordering the rivers. The lower parts of the valleys are crossed by tributary streams winding through the rice fields. These lowlands are generally protected by dikes and are completely

dominated by 300 to 1000 foot hills with moderate or steep slopes. The best terrain for movement across country is $\frac{1}{2}$ to 2 miles away from the streams, along the higher edges of the valleys, near the hills. Existing routes use these parts of the valleys. Terrain in the hills is not entirely suitable for cross-country movement, but numerous tributary valleys provide small, narrow passageways.

The Taedong-gang at this location winds southwestward between dike rice fields and steep, 300 to 500-foot hills. Small, tributary streams wind through the hills and rice fields. Dikes protect the low areas from flood waters. The entire lowland area is bordered by steep or moderately sloping hills, 300 to 1,200 feet high. The better routes for cross-country movement are very winding, and keep to the higher parts of the lowlands, near the hills. P'yongyang is a meeting place for routes from all directions. The Taedong is 400 to 500 yards wide at the city and has a swift current. The river constitutes a considerable obstacle to N-S movement.

P'yongan-namdo Hills. The P'yongan-namdo Hills subregion occupies a narrow area between the Taedong-gang Valley and the Ch'ongch'on-gang Valley. It extends nearly 100 miles NE-SW but is only 5 to 15 miles wide. The hills and ridges have no predominant alignment but extend in all directions. The small streams emptying into the Taedong-gang or into the Ch'ongch'on-gang from these hills flow generally NW or SE. Near the coast the hills are low and mostly rolling. Elevations are from 300 to 1,000 feet and the lower slopes are generally moderate. The summits have steep slopes or cliffs. Very high tides occur off this coast as elsewhere in western Korea. At low tide 1 to 5 miles of slimy mud flat may be exposed.

Near the coast, room for deployment is adequate, and numerous routes are available. A little farther inland, the hills increase in height and slopes and valley-sides become steeper; flat lowland is less common, and in many places the streams are in gorges. Still farther inland is a wilderness of 1,500-4,000-feet hills and mountains having little or no terrain suitable for operations. No motor roads cross

this inland area, only trails connect the few small settlements and cross-country movement by vehicles would be very difficult. The main north-south road and railroad (P'yongyang-Siniju) cross the western part of the region about 30 miles from the coast. The highest points on these routes are less than 330 feet above sea level.

E. THE OBJECTIVE AREA

SUNCH'ON

($39^{\circ}25'N$, $125^{\circ}56'E$)

1. Location and Importance

Sunch'on is located 30 miles northeast of P'yongyang on the right bank of the Taedong-gang at the foot of a series of low hills stretching to the west. It is chiefly important as a rail junction and classification center for transpeninsular and north-south rail traffic. A large calcium cyanamide plant situated in the city was virtually destroyed by UN Air Force bombing in September 1950.

2. Population

With the completed repatriation of Japanese nationals in the fall of 1946, the population of Sunch'on dropped to an estimated 21,000.

3. Access

a. Rail

Sunch'on lies at the junction of the north-south line from P'yongyang to the Manchurian border and the transpeninsular line to Wonsan via Kowon. Both lines are single-track and standard gauge. Local rail installations, including a large marshalling yard and limited rolling stock repair facilities, have been extensively damaged by recent bombings.

b. Road

A major north-south through-route from P'yongyang to Anju passes through Sunch'on. In the vicinity of Sunch'on, this gravel-surfaced all-weather road has an average width of 25 feet, a minimum radius of curvature of 100 feet, and a maximum gradient of 1:25. A secondary road runs to the east coast town of Yonghung; it has a minimum radius of curvature of 66 feet and a maximum gradient of 1:15, and is difficult to traverse during the rainy season.

c. Water

The Taedong-gang in the vicinity of Sunch'on is navigable by small, shallow-draft vessels and was reportedly used extensively to haul limestone for the calcium cyanamide plant. Ferries cross the river at three points in depths ranging from 3 to 10 feet. The river is fordable at several points.

4. Morphologic and functional characteristics

The Calcium cyanamide and carbide plant comprises the industrial core of Sunch'on. This plant, with its associated housing units, occupies a strip 1 mile wide, stretching between the Taedong-gang and the railroad. From this base the town forms a triangle extending beyond the rail line and marshalling yards to the northwest. Small industrial installations generally paralleling the railroad include three sawmills, two sericulture shops, a turpentine distillery, and an oil refinery. Schools and other civic installations are largely concentrated in the center of the triangle.

Single-story structures predominate, with a few buildings rising higher than two stories. In both domestic and industrial construction, wood is employed predominantly, although brick, manufactured locally, is used more extensively than in the average North Korean town.

F. THE FRIENDLY SITUATION (See Map 2)

1. Condition and Morale. According to Major Gormlie, a principal staff officer of the 187th RCT, "morale soared" when the final decision to jump into Sukchon-Sunchon was announced. The regiment had suffered few casualties and was still enjoying their success from the Kimpo Peninsula Operation. It was ready for action. Their training at Kimpo AFB had been challenging and the state of discipline and health was good. The leaders had scheduled health and sanitation classes, foot inspections, and USO shows to insure the health, welfare, and morale of the troops.⁵

2. Leadership. The commander, executive officer, and fire support coordinator jumped from the first plane of the first serial. On the DZ, their personal leadership was instrumental in organizing, directing, and controlling unit activities. Throughout the battle, which was characterized by small unit actions from squad to battalion levels, both NCO and officer made critical, and decisive decisions. Any analysis of the major phases of the battle, and key events, indicates that leaders were innovative in their approach to battlefield problems and flexible in adjusting to the changing nature of the battlefield. When leaders of units were injured or killed, the units continued to perform well for those assuming command.

3. Battle Experience and training. On 26 September 1950 the 187th RCT was assigned the mission, after air landing at Kimpo AFB Korea, to clear the 107th North Korean Security Regiment out of the Kimpo Peninsula. This peninsula is formed by the northwesternly course of the Han River into the Yellow Sea. The estimated strength of the opposing forces was 3,000 men. During this operation, which ended on 2 October 1950, the 187th RCT defeated the 107th North Korean Regiment, killing or capturing all but 300 and cleared the Kimpo Peninsula. The 187th RCT's successful combat activity in clearing the Kimpo Peninsula, and an analysis of their training activities prior to the Sukchon-Sunchon operation, reflects a well trained unit that emphasized physical fitness, maintenance, tactics, and combined arms training.⁶

4. Strength and Composition. a. The 187th RCT consisted of a total of 3,953 personnel on 21 October 1950. Reinforcements, consisting of one cavalry battalion, two tank companies, and one reinforced infantry brigade, were available on 22 October 1950.⁷

b. The 187th RCT consisted of:

- 3 Airborne Infantry Battalions
- 1 Airborne Field Artillery (105mm) Battalion
- 1 Airborne Engineer Company
- 1 Airborne Anti-Aircraft Artillery Battery
- 1 Support Company
- 1 MP Detachment
- 1 Pathfinder Detachment
- 1 Intelligence and Reconnaissance Platoon
- 1 Security Platoon
- 1 Anti-Mine Platoon
- 1 Medical Company
- 4 FAC (forward air control parties) attached

TAC air support

5. Weapons and Vehicles. Weapon systems, fighting vehicles, and other tactical equipment used by soldiers of the 187th RCT during this operation included: 105mm howitzers, 90mm anti-tank guns, 25mm recoilless rifles, .30 caliber machine guns, flame throwers, 4.2" mortars, M-1 rifles, .45 caliber pistols, Browning Automatic rifles (BAR), light machineguns and 60mm mortars.

6. Mission and Objective. The 187th RCT's mission was divided into six parts:⁸ (See Maps 3, 4, and 5)

Land by parachute-P-hour, D-day, seize, occupy and defend Sukchon-Sunchon area.

Disrupt an MSR and LOC to prevent enemy withdrawal to the north and passage of reinforcement and supply south in sector.

Capture important North Korean military and civilian officials.

Facilitate advance of friendly units.

Perform such POW liberation raids as can be accomplished without jeopardizing primary missions of (1), (2), and (3).

When contact is established report to CG 8th Army.

The 187th RCT's objectives included:

The immediate objectives for the second battalion were to air drop on DZ Easy, clear Sunchon (See Map 4) of enemy forces, seize and secure Objective 1, establish road blocks, and prevent the enemy's withdrawal to the north or resupply to the south. Objectives for the first and third battalions were to air drop on DZ William, seize and secure objectives 2 and 3, clear Sukchon (See Map 5) of enemy forces, establish road blocks, and prevent the enemy's withdrawal to the north or resupply to the south. Their objectives were consistent with the strategic and tactical goal of the 8th Army: to trap North Korean elements or individuals attempting to escape to the north and the possible liberation of UN prisoners of war.⁹

G. LOGISTICAL SITUATION

1. GENERAL SITUATION:

The role of the 187th RCT in the Sukchon-Sunchon operation stimulated new requirements upon the logistic planning support community. The 187th RCT's mission was to air drop, land by parachute, to seize, occupy, and defend the Sukchon-Sunchon area until link-up with the 8th (US) Army. Additionally, the 187th was to disrupt a main supply route/line of communication to prevent withdrawal of enemy forces to the North, and keep the enemy from moving reinforcements and supplies South.¹⁰ Since World War II, this operation was the first combat air drop of troops

with resupply solely dependent upon air drop. The doctrine for air drop of troops, and particularly supplies, had been neither significantly developed nor improved after World War II. This particular operation became the basis for lessons learned to conduct future parachute operations involving both troops and logistical support.

The enemy situation depicted the North Korean forces as rapidly withdrawing from the 38th Parallel before the advancing 8th (US) Army and South Korean units. The enemy was disorganized, poorly equipped, and had offered only sporadic resistance at key points leading to their capital of P'yongyang. The main threat to the 187th RCT was an enemy desperation attack to break through the 187th RCT's Sukchon-Sunchon positions. Only limited enemy air attacks were anticipated to threaten ground and air drop operations. The threat of Chinese, Russian, or guerrilla activity was considered minor.¹¹

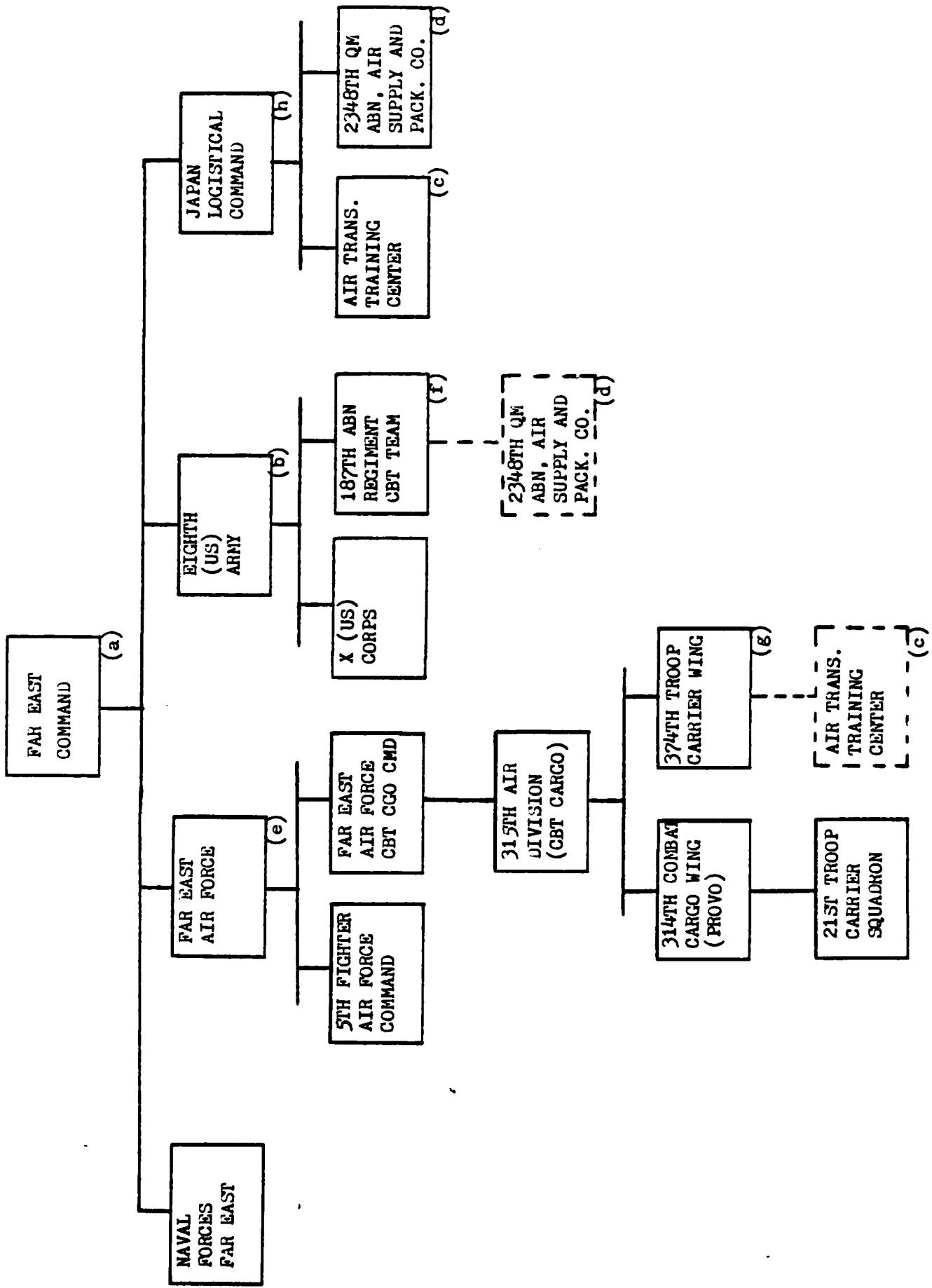
The friendly forces concept of operation required logistical channels to support parachute landings of all combat units on D-Day (20 October 1950), combat support and combat service support units on D-Day and D-1, and for heavy equipment and resupply drops during the first three days of the operation.¹² To support airlift requirements, the Far East Command tasked the Far East Air Force to airlift 187th from Kimpo Airbase to the air drop zones, and to conduct air resupply for the 187th RCT as required. The 8th (US) Army provided the 187th RCT with logistical support at Kimpo Airbase and again upon link-up.¹³ All equipment necessary for the immediate accomplishment of the mission was air dropped with the assault echelon and follow-up echelon.¹⁴ All critical equipment not air dropped into the air-head but essential for sustained operations, was transported forward in the land tail echelon,¹⁵ which was attached to 8th (US) Army until link-up.

Examination of the mission, equipment, and supplies carried indicated the mission duration was expected to last no more than three or four days. This was the first troop air drop in the Korean conflict and a 3 to 4 day link-up would have

been consistent with the U.S. World War II planning and experience. The fact that plans make no mention of heavy equipment or resupply drops after D-2 is a further indication of the planned short mission duration. This is also in concert with the anticipated weak enemy opposition.

2. SUPPORT STRUCTURE:

The Sukchon-Sunchon operational requirements placed this tactical action definitionally under the umbrella of joint operations. The Air Force possessed the airlift assets necessary for the Army to conduct parachute landings of troops, equipment, and supplies. Additionally, the Air Force was required to maintain air superiority and perform close air support against the enemy. Key players in this joint operation are depicted on the following organizational chart with additional clarifying information provided in the accompanying footnotes:



FOOTNOTES:

a. The Far East Command's (FEC) area of responsibility included Korea, Japan, Philippines, and several other countries in this region. With the outbreak of hostilities and the corresponding influx of military forces into South Korea, FEC recognized the need for realigning the logistical support structure. On 25 August 1950, the FEC established the Japan Logistical Command (JLC) which assumed all logistical support performed in Japan. This responsibility was previously assigned to 8th (US) Army who was now deployed in Korea.¹⁶ This enabled 8th (US) Army to concentrate its attention on operations within Korea.

b. Located in Japan at the time of hostilities were initiated, 8th (US) Army was responsible for organizing and operating aerial ports of the embarkation at Tachikawa Air Force Base and Ashiya AFB in Japan, plus Pusan, Taeju, and Pohang bases in Korea. Eighth (US) Army placed their 130 Air Transportability Training Center (ATTC) personnel on temporary duty with the 314th Troop Carrier Wing to accomplish the requirements. Additionally local labor was hired to assist in moving supplies and equipment to Korea, i.e., 200 Japanese at Ashiya. With designation of the JLC, the ATTC detachment located in Japan was assigned to JLC for control. Consistent with previous actions, ATTC personnel remained on TDY status until December 1950, when they were assigned permanently to their TDY airfields.¹⁷

c. ATTC was formed from the 11th Airborne Division personnel who remained in theater (Japan) following the Division's return to CONUS. Prior to hostilities and arrival of the 2348th QM Company from the States, the ATTC personnel were the only source of training and support assets for all phases of air transportability.

d. The 2348th Quartermaster Airborne, Air Supply and Packaging Company (2348th QM Co.) was activated on 21 July 1950, at Camp Campbell, Kentucky, with 94 personnel and arrived in Japan on 2 September 1950. Assigned to the JLC, three officers and 55 men of the 2348th QM Co. were attached later in September to

the 187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team (187th RCT) to support the 187th RCT's air drop mission in the Sukchon-Sunchon operation.¹⁸ The 2348th QM Co. existed prior to activation as a platoon. This platoon was the only unit available with training and experience in joint Army-Air Force operations. In 1949 the concept of the Sukchon-Sunchon operation had been tested using three 2348th QM Co. Air Force C-119 aircraft, and Army combat forces. This test established the feasibility of logically supporting forces using air drop to resupply and reinforce.¹⁹

e. Far East Air Force provided both fighter and cargo troop carrying aircraft to support the Sukchon-Sunchon operation.²⁰

f. The 187th Airborne Regiment Combat Team (187th RCT) was air dropped as the principal combat force to seize, occupy, and defend Sukchon-Sunchon area until link up was accomplished by 8th (US) Army. Prior to their deployment to Korea, the 187th RCT had conducted joint training with the 314th Combat Cargo Wing (Prov) at Camp Campbell, Kentucky.

g. The 374th Troop Carrier Wing was assisted by ATTC personnel at aerial ports used to forward supplies and equipment into Korea.

h. The Japan Logistical Command (JLC), upon activation, became responsible for supporting all United Nations troops in Korea (except British). JLC's tasks included receiving, and storing, loading, and securing material in aircraft, participating in aerial deliveries, documenting and maintaining mission records, and conducting liaison with supporting Air Force units.

3. LOGISTICAL REQUIREMENTS:

A. SUPPLY:

With the Sukchon-Sunchon forces staging out of Kimpo Airfield, both the Air Force and Army had major supply requirements. First, the Army requirements will be addressed then the Air Force requirements will be addressed.

The primary force airdropped into Sukchon-Sunchon was the 187th RCT. Ammunition and food received the priority of concern by the 187th RCT. Early missions of the 187th RCT battalions involved securing objectives, clearing towns, patrolling, and setting up road blocks. As the enemy moved north toward the 187th RCT's position and ahead of the advancing 8th (US) Army, artillery, anti-tank, machinegun ammunition, and medical supplies received the majority of attention. Due to the defend mission of the 187th RCT, the fact that Sukchon and Sunchon were only 26 kms apart, and that their on order movement to P'yongyang, North Korea's capitol was only 45 kms from either town, Class III was not a primary concern. Additionally, several of the 187th RCT's vehicles were contained in the Land Tail accompanying 8th (US) Army.

Supplies and equipment required by the air dropped 187th RCT forces were either carried by individual personnel or dropped as door bundles and heavy drop loads (supplies and equipment) with parachutes. Although this operation occurred before the worst of Korean winter weather, the 187th RCT leadership ensured the troops were prepared for cold weather. This is evidenced from the cold weather clothing and equipment items required to be carried by each person dropped by parachute:

Helmet w/liner	Blanket, wool, DD (1)
Jacket, M-43	Poncho or Raincoat (1)
Sweater high-neck or	Belt, pistol or rifle
Jacket, pile OD	Canteen, cup, cover
Undershirt, wool (2)	Ammunition (Basic load)
Drawers, wool (2)	Halazone tablets
Shirt, wool, fanneel or D	Pocket and pouch, 1st aid
Trousers, wool, OD or shade 33	Toilet Articles
Boots, combat and prct	Towel
Socks, wool, cushion sole pr (2)	Tool entrenching
Gloves, shell, pr (1)	Individual weapon
Gloves, wool, linen pr (1)	Rations

All other clothing and equipment not mentioned above and not carried by the individual was placed in "A" bags for transport by unit vehicles in the Land Tail.²¹

Immediate supply support included CL I, CL III and CL V. Class I: all individuals jumped with two rations (1 type "c" and 1 assault type or 2 type "c"); one type "c" ration unit basic load was air dropped with each unit on D-Day. Unit resupply was to begin on D+1 from 187th RCT stocks and resupply in the airhead was to begin on D+2. Class II and IV were not scheduled for resupply initially, however, emergency requirements were radioed to base for resupply by air. Class III resupply was by air on a daily basis, however, issue of gasoline was not to begin until D+1. Additionally, each heavy drop vehicle was air dropped with tanks 3/4 full and 2 full 5 gallon cans. Class V: all units air dropped a basic load of ammunition on D-Day and received resupply on D+1. Planning guidance also provided procedures for declaring surplus ammunition for redistribution, and prohibited abandoning unit ammunition stock piles. Water: all individuals jumped with one full canteen except medical personnel who carried two full canteens. Halazone tablet treatment was required to make local water potable. Water required for medical aid stations was resupplied by air. Captured material procedures provided for reporting to the appropriate staff officer for instructions, i.e., ammunition to the ammunition officer, vehicles to the S-4.22

The Air Force supply support requirements for aircraft and air crews staging at Kimpo Air Base to airlift the 187th RCT included the following: Class I: for all personnel of the 314th Combat Cargo Wing (Prov) and 21st Troop Carrier Squadron, plus three levels of emergency rations on each aircraft for the aircrew. Class II and IV: units were required to self-deploy sufficient TO&E equipment and ground handling equipment to accomplish maintenance, to include night lighting equipment and generators. Class III: the C-119 aircraft were serviced only at home stations unit with 2,500 gallons of fuel. C-47 aircraft were serviced at home stations with 804 gallons and an additional 250 gallons at Kimpo Air Base. Scheduled

aircraft required 380,000 gallons of fuel for the C-119 aircraft and an additional 42,120 gallons for the C-47 aircraft to complete the three day air drop operation.²³

B. TRANSPORTATION:

Airlift and air resupply of the 187th RCT to the two drop zones was assigned to the 314th Combat Cargo Wing (Prov) and 21st Troop Carrier Squadron of the Far East Air Force Combat Corps Command. A total of 80 C-119 aircraft (57 for personnel; 23 for heavy drop) and 40 C-47 aircraft for personnel were planned for D-Day; 57 C-119s (21 personnel, 36 heavy drop) for D+1, and 15 C-119 aircraft (heavy drop) on D+2. The aircraft arrived at Kimpo Air Base from Ashiya and Brady Air Base, Japan, D-1 with 20 hours remaining for marshalling and loading. The loading was accomplished by 187th RCT personnel who were assisted by the 2348th QM Abn Air Supply and Packing Company. A six hour delay in departure time permitted the 2348th QM Co. and aircrew to check aircraft loading and correct most errors. One aircraft crew member was required to be present during the loading of his aircraft. Additionally, two personnel of the 2348th QM Co. accompanied each heavy drop aircraft; they assisted with the drop but did not jump. In order to meet the surge requirements for 120 aircraft to be available on D-1 to support D-Day, both airlift organizations used a maintenance stand down beginning D-4. This stand down enabled all C-119 aircraft scheduled for heavy drop loads to have the rear clamshell doors removed prior to departing home base stations. By dropping personnel from 700 feet above ground level (AGL) and heavy drop loads from 1,500 feet AGL, the Air Force transported the following:

PERSONNEL

	<u># AIRCRAFT</u>	<u>PLANNED</u>	<u>DROPPED</u>
*D-Day	97	3,108	2,673
D+1	54	<u>774</u>	<u>671</u>
TOTAL		3,882	3,344 (86% of plan)²⁴

*Aircraft also dropped a total of 12 Tons (300lb. door bundles) with the troops²⁵

EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES

	<u># AIRCRAFT</u>	<u>DROPPED</u>	<u>DELIVERED</u>	<u>REMARKS</u>
D-Day	23	12 Howitzers 12 Jeeps 4 90 mm 4 3/4 ton trucks 6 1/4 ton trailers 42 tons artillery/ composite ammunition	9 9 2 3 6 37 tons	1 didn't leave the ground 1 streamed in 1 Malfunction in plane 2 malfunction in plane 1 streamed in 1 broke loose 1 streamed in 1 broke loose 5 G-5 ammo bundles streamed in
D+1	22 (20 a/c plus from D-Day)	2 Howitzers 2 Jeeps 35 Tons Ration 6 Trailers 49 Tons 105 Ammunition	2 2 28 tons 6 48	
D+2	13	1 Howitzer 4 Jeeps 18 1/4 ton Trailer 7 Tons Ration 1 Load Gas & Water 42 Tons 105	1 4 18 7 1 load	1 load unrecovered 4 Barrels gas, 14 barrels water

		Ammunition	42
D+3	10	35 Tons Rations	35
		14 Tons Artillery	
		Ammunition	14
		2 Loads Gas & Water	2 loads
			24 Barrels gas 12 barrels water
		1 Load signal supplies & 105 Ammunition	1 load ²⁶

AIR DROP RECAP TOTALS

<u>D-DAY THRU D+3</u>	<u>DROPPED</u>	<u>RECOVERED/ SERVICEABLE</u>	<u>REMARKS</u>
Personnel	3,344	(See Personnel Section)	
Howitzers	15	12	
Jeeps	8	15	
90mm	4	2	
3/4 Ton Trucks	4	3	
1/4 Ton Trailers	30	30	
Ammunition	147	141 tons	(133 Tons Artillery 105 mm, 14 Tons Composite)
Rations	77 Tons	70 tons	
Water	26 Barrels	26 barrels	
Gasoline	28 Barrels	28 barrels	
Signal Supplies	1 Load	1 load	

Key highlights of the air drop operations are as follows: 12 of the 15 howitzers and two of the four 90mm anti-tanks guns were dropped successfully. Additionally, 92% of the 147 tons of ammunition was recovered.

The remainder of the 187th RCT was transported in the Land Tail Echelon accompanying the 8th (US) Army ground advance toward Sukchon-Sunchon. The Land Tail Echelon contained elements of the following units: Remnants of each Infantry Battalion; 647th Field Artillery Battalion; Battery "A", 88th Anti-Aircraft Artillery, Company "A," 127 Abn Engineer Battalion; Headquarters and Headquarters Company; Medical Company; Support Company; Military Police Detachment; Service Company. The equipment transported by the land tail was given priority to position according to the estimated needs of the 187th RCT air dropped forces upon link-

up. Priorities were identified in order as: medical supplies; communications equipment; sleeping bags; winter clothing; POL; rations; kitchens; spare parts-accessories - cleaning and preserving materials; organic equipment; remainder of convoy.²⁷

C. SERVICES:

Maintenance capabilities of the 187th RCT were limited to minor repairs on weapons, commo equipment, and vehicles. The Parachute maintenance section was responsible for recovering all parachute equipment that was practical, and assisting the 187th RCT's S-4 in policing the DZ's. Medical support began at the company level with aid men rendering emergency treatment and directing walking wounded to the Battalion Medical Collection Point. Non-walking wounded were transported by Battalion Aid Station Litter Bearers to the Battalion Collection Point, Battalion and Regimental Aid Stations provided surgical and treatment support. Both separate Battalion and Regiment Collection Points were located near air strips to enhance air evacuation of the wounded and deceased.²⁸

Maintenance support for Air Force aircraft, vehicles, and equipment belonging to units staging at Kimpo Air Base was limited to the deployed organizational and field maintenance capabilities. Aircraft requiring maintenance over and above the units deployed capability were returned to home station for repair. Medical support was provided by the Commanding Officer of Kimpo Air Base.²⁹

4. RECAPITULATION OF LOGISTICAL OPERATION

A. General: The air drop operation to sever major supply routes in enemy territory disrupted logistical lines of communication which favored enemy operations. The friendly lines of communications to support the air dropped 187th RCT forces were limited to aerial resupply and replacements until link up with Eighth (US) Army. This limitation was further complicated by World War II air drop doctrine

which lacked development in heavy drop (trucks, howitzers) capability. As the first combat air drop operation since World War II, this operation provided the lessons for planning and conducting further air drop operations with heavy drops for improved combat effectiveness, and sustainment.³⁰

B. Air Drop: The following factors, identified in a conference held 30 October 1950, on the Sukchon-Sunchon air drop with representatives of the 187th RCT, 314th Air Division Combat Cargo Command (CCC), Fifth Air Force, and Weapon System Evaluation Group (WSEG) from the office of the Secretary of Defense, affected the operation's efficiency:³¹

(1) As the first combat air drop operation since World War II and the first combat air drop of heavy loads (trucks, howitzers) both doctrine and procedures for heavy drop and aerial resupply were lacking. Because ground forces were not fully cognizant of aerial drop capabilities, constant changing of requests for phased equipment and supplies to be delivered by air drop occurred up to and during the last 24 hours prior to D-Day. Advancement of D-Day by twenty four hours further complicated the confusion.³² It was recognized in this operation and again in the Munsan-ni operation in March 1951, that standard operating procedures (SOP) were required to simplify planning, adjusting, and controlling the delivery of equipment and supplies by air drop. This SOP was finally published as "Heavy Drop Loading Plan I (SOP for Heavy Drop Loading)," HQ, 187th Abn RCT, 12 October 1951.³³

(2) The staging of the operation at Kimpo Air Base in lieu of the 2348th QM Air Supply and Packing Company's home station at Ashiya Air Base, Japan, imposed rigging and loading difficulties on the operation. Kimpo lacked facilities for storage of drop equipment that was necessary during the wet weather occurring prior to D-Day. Additionally, the lack of material handling equipment (cranes, hoists, forklifts) further frustrated the situation. Only two forklifts were available at Kimpo, which considerably slowed the loading of equipment and supplies into the 120 aircraft.³⁴

Additional resources left behind at Ashiya Air Base included the 100+ Japan laborers used to perform unskilled jobs which in turn required the use of other airmen and soldiers at Kimpo. This labor problem caused reduced performance in other preparation tasks. Later operations such as Munsan-ni were staged from Ashiya Air Base which resolved much of the facilities and material handling equipment problem.³⁵

(3) The lack of facilities and resource described previously resulted in the 187th RCT's Maintenance Parachute Company being left behind at Ashiya. This, coupled with insufficient training of both the 187th RCT and 2348th QM Co. personnel for heavy equipment rigging, resulted in heavy drop loads breaking loose in the air and streaming in. In fact only 50% of the 2348th personnel had airborne experience; furthermore, this was their first heavy drop operation and they had no prior opportunity to train because the heavy demand for resupply of units in combat. Additionally, the lack of coordination identified further surfaced training deficiencies.³⁶ At the end of October, 1950, after completion of the 187th RCT air drop operation, the 2348th immediately began an intensive training program in rigging heavy equipment and other phases of air transportability. This program's purpose was to rectify deficiencies noted during the Sukchon-Sunchon operation. This program trained both leaders and Japanese nationals (laborers), and by December, 1950, the labor force was expanded to approximately 300. The results of training native laborers later proved invaluable as aerial resupply tonnage demands increased. It was not necessary to augment the 2348th, renamed 8081st AU, with additional U.S. personnel. In fact, it became common for an entire Japanese crew under supervision of one U.S. soldier to carry out each phase of preparing and loading supplies for air drop.³⁷

(4) The lack of sufficient rigging and air drop equipment, particularly cargo parachutes, was crucial throughout the first year of the Korean conflict. At the outbreak of hostilities only the following assets were available:

<u>Quantity</u>	<u>Nomenclature</u>
2,000	G-1 Personnel Parachutes
500	A-6 Aerial Containers
500	A-4 Aerial Containers
300	A-10 Cargo Nets ³⁸

Early in the conflict, 1,000 condemned Air Force personnel parachutes were converted to cargo parachutes by removing the parachute harness, sewing two snap fasteners to the remaining webbing, and adding a static line. Eventually 7,000 parachutes were received from sources within FEC. Theater stocks were further supplemented by the arrival of the 2348th QM Co. with 21,000 G-9 type cargo parachutes, and the arrival of the 187th RCT.³⁹ The requirement to use large quantities of the air drop equipment in resupply missions prior to the Sukchon-Sunchon operation reduced the amount of serviceable and on hand stocks. In addition to the Sukchon-Sunchon operation, 197 tons of supplies and equipment were rigged, packed, and dispatched from Ashiya and Brady Air Force Base to combat forces in Korea from July through October 1950.⁴⁰ An unsatisfactory recovery rate of air drop equipment further complicated the extensive demands on air drop capabilities. The exigencies of the tactical situation and the lack of equipment recovery discipline of receiving units attributed to the low recovery rates. Another factor contributing to the shortage of air drop equipment was the complete nonavailability of replenishment from the Zone of Interior.⁴¹ Heavy drop accessory equipment was in such short supply that it was required to be returned to Kimpo on the same day it was used.⁴² Sufficient concern existed at the time of the Sukchon-Sunchon operation that an equipment recovery detail consisting of one officer and thirty

enlisted men, fifteen were from the 187th RCT, Parachute Maintenance Company, were dropped in on D+1. This recovery mission was essential for maintaining the striking capability of the 187th for future air drop operations. Major portions of heavy drop rigging were recovered and it is estimated that 80 percent of all personnel parachutes were recovered.⁴³ This issue became critical enough for 8th Army to issue directions in 1951, charging each receiving unit's commander with the responsibility for expeditious and safe delivery of air drop equipment to the closest designated collection point.⁴⁴

During the Sukchon-Sunchon Operation, the G-5 cargo parachute was considered to be essential for the heavy drop of the 187th. The only other types of parachutes available were the G-1 and G-9, which could support only 200 and 250 pounds as compared to the G-5's 3,000 pound load capacity. The smaller packages had some such as requiring less space and having the capability to be discharged manually. Door bundles ensured that critical equipment, signal and communications, was on the ground with the troops in the event of a malfunction of the monorail system. The G-5 parachute and its larger capacity had several advantages: it reduced the number of parachutes required, fewer parachutes in the air reduced the frequency of fouling and tangling during descent; use of the G-5 reduced scattering on the drop zone and its use facilitated recovery of vital air drop equipment.⁴⁵

(5) Due to the short planning time span between alert and drop, there was insufficient time to brief the Combat Cargo Command (CCC) concerning resupplying the 187th RCT. This, coupled with the lack of radio communication during resupply drops, prevented the 187th RCT from directing resupply drops to preferred locations.⁴⁶

(6) Despite link up with 8th (US) Army, air resupply was required for two additional days. This requirement was dictated by initial combat ground forces having insufficient rations to supply the 187th RCT. Additionally, this time was

required to allow the main body to clear and secure LOC's plus let the 187th RCT's land-tail catch up.⁴⁷

(7) Orderly reorganization after drop was critical to mission success and to sustainability of the 187th RCT. Units were required to report to the next higher headquarters within 30 minutes after landing. Reports included shortages of personnel plus the number of crew served weapons missing or damaged beyond use.⁴⁸ Due to a shortage of paint for marking bundles, as outlined in 187th RCT's published Memorandum #24, annex 4, dated 27 July 1950, the 187th RCT published Memorandum #25, "SOP for Marking Bundles," 13 October 1950, to facilitate reorganization of equipment and supplies within drop zones. The plan of Memorandum #24 generally provided for the parachute canopy color to designate the battalion of the regiment on a single drop zone or individual companies on a battalion drop zone. Additionally, during aerial resupply canopy color denoted the general type of equipment and supplies. The end caps of bundles and containers were color coded for battalion identification, labeled by company letter, and numerically coded for content identification. Memorandum #25, primarily provided for changing paint color codes to available paint colors. These procedures appear to have been satisfactory as no degradatory comments were identified in the post operation conference.

C. Transportation After Air Drop: Several observations were made concerning transportation assets and resources requiring transport once dropped.

(1) Lack of aircraft prevented dropping sufficient transportation equipment of the right type. More 3/4 ton trucks were required to haul artillery ammunition and to tow artillery equipment (guns). More 1/4 ton trucks (jeeps) were required for transporting the 75mm recoilless gun and ammo. The 1/4 ton trucks that were dropped proved unreliable because of constant overloading and continuous operation. Frequent demands for medical evacuation to aid stations and medical

points kept most jeeps occupied as litter carriers. Even the use of captured enemy vehicles, two Russian built GAZ-51 trucks, did not resolve this issue.⁴⁹

(2) Equipment of the airborne anti-aircraft battalions is difficult to move from drop zones. The quad's wheels were too small (equipment light supportability problem on soft, wet soil surfaces) and towed 40's were too bulky (maneuver problem in brush, trees, on narrow roads, and steep slopes.)⁵⁰

(3) The Land Tail convoy departed at 0900, 22 October 1950, from Kimpo and established initial contact with 187th RCT at 2300, 22 October 1950.⁵¹ The 142 mile convoy distance required 14 hours for the lead elements to establish contact with air dropped forces; this convoy averaged 10 miles per hour indicating lack of suitable road networks to affect rapid resupply exploitation by ground maneuver.

(4) The most noteworthy observation concerning medical evacuation involved the use of helicopters and light aircraft. Twenty-two October 1950 was noted as the busiest day for the medical company. Although "casualties were moderately heavy, almost immediate evacuation by means of helicopter and light aircraft, diminished greatly the mortality rate of the 187th RCT."⁵²

D. Supply: Deficiencies were noted within the characteristics of some supplies or in the capabilities to obtain resupply.

(1) Class I. All beverage and food stuffs from indigenous sources were considered to be contaminated and their consumption strictly prohibited. The inability to use local sources of class I required the 187th RCT to carry and to be resupplied more frequently. A requirement for a ration that would fit into a soldier's pocket or that could be easily attached to the soldier surfaced during the operation. Only the assault ration came closest to satisfying this requirement, however, only 1,700 assault rations were available to support the 3,344 personnel dropped. Consequently, 77 tons of the more bulky type rations were dropped to support the 187th RCT.⁵³

(2) Water: In the interest of disease control, all water was considered to be non-potable until purified by standard procedure set forth in FM 21-10 and FM5-295. Calcium hypochlorite was to be added to lyster bags or other suitable containers, and Halazone tablets added to canteens. However, water for medical purposes was air dropped requiring recovery from drop zones and distribution to medical facilities.⁵⁴

(3) Class V: Ammunition resupply nearly became a critical issue for more than one unit of the 187th RCT. On the evening of 21 October 1950, from 2400 hours until 0400 hoursthe mortar platoon of the Support Company was forced to cease firing because of low ammunition. The 3rd Battalion, 187th RCT, nearly ran out of ammunition; resupply was delayed by an inability to communicate directly to Kimpo Air Base for immediate requests. Additionally, as resupply drops were accomplished, ground forces were unable to communicate for drops to desired locations. This further delayed resupply of units in critically low supply levels due to time lost in recovery and distribution.⁵⁵

E. Services: Maintenance capability was limited primarily to the organizational capability of the units air dropped. Signal equipment maintenance and availability of radios was noted as a serious problem. Due to the limited amount of air drop assets (equipment and aircraft) and the corresponding limitation on amounts of signal equipment and maintenance capability that can be carried into the initial assault, a high priority must be given for resupply of signal equipment. Since repair of equipment at battalion level was not feasible, replacement of equipment was most desirable and was accomplished until on hand stocks were exhausted.⁵⁶

F. Prisoners of War: The capture of 3,818 North Korean soliders created a sizeable drain on the 187th RCT resources, personnel and supplies. An MP detachment operated POW enclosures near Sukchon. Rations, medical, and transport assets were drawn upon to support detention of hostile personnel.⁵⁷

5. LOGISTICS SUMMARY:

Logistically, the air drops and aerial resupply of the 187th RCT was a success and provided the combat edge required for the 187th RCT to succeed in enemy territory until link-up with Eighth (US) Army forces. These operations were accomplished against an enemy whose lines of communication were short and who had the advantage of relying entirely on land LOC's.

The Sukchon-Sunchon Airdrop Operation, as the first combat air drop of troops since World War II and the first air drop of heavy equipment and heavy supply loads, became the base for developing the air drop doctrine and techniques plus procedures for future air drop operations. The successful logistical support (air drop personnel, supplies and equipment) through air lines of communication opened a new era in U.S. military capability. This newly accepted capability included the use of helicopters for immediate evacuation of casualties, which reduced the mortality rate significantly, and the later use to resupply critical combat materiel. The importance of air drop logistics capabilities learned from Sukchon-Sunchon operations was evident by the successful resupply of the 1st (US) Marine Division and 7th (US) Infantry Division from 28 November 1950 through 9 December 1950. These units were trapped on the West and East sides of the Choshin Reservoir with land lines of communication resupply cut. Through aerial resupply these units of near Corps strength were sustained in combat for 12 days, against superior numbers of enemy until completion of a successful withdrawal. Based on the skills, experience, and training achieved during and after Sukchon-Sunchon, the same support units completed this largest air resupply operations in history by packaging and air dropping 1,643 tons and air landing 202 tons.⁵⁸

H. PERSONNEL SITUATION

1. General: The unit designated by DA to meet the airborne requirements of the FEC was the 187th Airborne Infantry Regiment of the 11th Airborne Division. This unit, stationed at Camp Campbell, Kentucky at the time of its alert in July 1950 for overseas movement, was converted to an airborne regimental combat team (RCT) on 1 August. Composition of the 187th RCT was as follows:

187th Regimental Combat Team

Regimental Headquarters and Headquarters Company

Regimental Service Company

Regimental Medical Company

Regimental Support Company

HHC, 1st Battalion

Company "A"

Company "B"

Company "C"

Company "D"

HHC, 2nd Battalion

Company "E"

Company "F"

Company "G"

Company "H"

HHC, 3rd Battalion

Company "I"

Company "K"

Company "L"

Company "M"

64th Airborne Field Artillery Battalion

Company "A," 127th Airborne Engineer Battalion

Battery "A," 88th Airborne Anti-Aircraft Battalion

On 23 August 1950 per General Order Number 41, Headquarters, 11th Airborne Division, dated 22 August 1950⁵⁹ the following units were added to the 187th RCT:

Detachment, 11th Airborne Military Police Company

Detachment, 11th Airborne Quartermaster Parachute Maintenance Company

On 26 August 1950 per General Order Number 42, Headquarters, 11th Airborne Division dated 25 August 1950 the following units were added to the 187th RCT:

Platoon, Clearing Company, 11th Airborne Medical Battalion

Platoon, Ambulance Company, 11th Airborne Medical Battalion

On 28 August 1950 per Annex "J" (List of Commanders) Operation Order Number 1, IX Corp, the 2348th Quartermaster Air Packing and Resupply Company was attached to the 187th RCT.⁶⁰

a. From the date of its organization as an RCT until its departure for Camp Stoneman, California, on 1 September 1950, the 187th RCT received personnel replacements from the 82nd Airborne Division, Fort Bragg, North Carolina; 511th Airborne Infantry Regiment, Fort Campbell, Kentucky and the Airborne Training Battalion, The Infantry School, Fort Benning, Georgia, to bring it up to authorized strength. The 187th underwent intensive tactical training, including a full-scale airborne RCT operation. Additionally, administrative instructions were published and carried out on the making of wills, Powers of Attorney, clearing post, making out allotments, and insurance. On 31 August, just prior to leaving Camp Campbell, the aggregate strength of the 187th RCT was 222 officers, 11 warrant officers and 4,177 enlisted men.⁶¹

The 187th movement schedule from Camp Campbell to Korea is outlined below:

<u>PLACES</u>	<u>ARRIVED</u>	<u>DEPARTED</u>
Fort Campbell, Kentucky		1 September 1950

Camp Stoneman, California	4 September 1950	6 September 1950
Moji, Kyushu, Japan	20 September 1950	21 September 1950
Ashiya AFB, Kyushu, Japan	21 September 1950	25 September 1950
Kimpo AFB, Korea	25 September 1950	29 September 1950
Kimpo, Korea	29 September 1950	2 October 1950
Kimpo AFB Housing Area, Korea	2 September 1950	20 September 1950
Sukchon-Sunchon, Korea	20 October 1950	24 October 1950

On 24 September 1950, prior to departing for Kimpo AFB, Korea, the 187th RCT received 180 replacements and assigned them to units. The replacements consisted of one (1) Major, two (2) Captains, fifteen (15) Lieutenants, and one hundred sixty-two (162) Enlisted men.⁶²

b. On 6 October 1950, 1LT Peter G. Arend was appointed RCT Public Information Officer and work was started on a press camp. On 7 October 1950 Howard Sochurck, Life Photographs; Fred Waters, International News Service; Norman Williams, Acme New Services; James Cannon, Baltimore Sun; James Michael, New York Times; Lionel Crane, London Daily Express; and Phillips Daughty, Agency French Press moved in to cover the 187th on its operation. Other newspapermen and correspondents who were scheduled to cover the operation were Bob Vermillion, United Press Reporter; Max Desfor, Associated Press Photographer; Sidney Smith, London Daily Express; Jean Marie Premonville, Agency French Press; Gene Jones, NBC Television Newsreel Photographer; Charles Jones, NBC Television Newsreel Photographer; Cpl Leonard Lotora, GHQ, FEC, Motion Picture Cameraman; Sgt Lester A. Marks, D. Staff Film Report; and Cpl Lawrence Kane, Stars & Stripes Reporter. These men were outfitted with equipment, briefed, and sworn to secrecy. Their "pre-jump" stories were turned into the 187th RCT PIO and held by the PIO at Kimpo, AFB until P-(Parachute) Hour. Plans were made to jump three of the

correspondents in a training exercise on 13 October. Cpl Kane, Howard Sochurck and Jean Marie Premonville participated in the practice jump.⁶³

2. PLANNING

a. On 16 October UNC Operations Order Number 3 directed the 187th RCT to land by parachute on 21 October and to seize, occupy, and defend the Sukchon-Sunchon area. Staff Section Plans were ordered to be in by noon 17 October. Activities took on a feverish tempo.⁶⁴

On 17 October Major Ed Radican, Commanding Officer, 71st Signal Battalion called on Colonel Bowen to make an Official Staff Film Report of the operation. On the night of 17 October a Korean Band and Blues Singer entertained the men on a stage erected by Special Services. Music was excellent. Staff sections and units worked into the night preparing manifests.⁶⁵

On 17 October the S-2 recommended to the Commander that security guards be doubled and that an 1800 hours curfew be established for all Enlisted Men. This was done.⁶⁶

On 18 October, GHQ advanced D-Day to 20 October. Following reconnaissance flights, it was decided that the drop would be made in two areas; drop zone WILLIAM at Sukchon and drop zone EASY at Sunchon. Plans called for the drop of the 1st and 3rd Battalions at Sukchon, the 2nd Battalion at Sunchon, and elements of the FA battalion divided between the two drop zones. The Administrative Annex to the Operations Order was published.

b. The S-1 portion of the Administrative Order which accompanied Operations Order Number 1, 187th Airborne RCT, dated 190030 October 1950, for the Sukchon-Sunchon Operation follows:

EVACUATION AND HOSPITALIZATION.⁶⁷

a. Battalion.

1. Company aid men will render emergency treatment on the DZ; direct walking wounded to Bn Med Collecting Point (respective assembly area of Bn).
2. Battalion Aid Station will set up vicinity of respective Battalion Headquarters assembly area and be composed of the Battalion Surgeon and the necessary technicians.
3. Battalion Medical Assistants will direct recovery of bundles with necessary personnel.
4. Battalion Aid Station Litter Bearers with Battalion Medical Assistants will transport litter cases to the Battalion Collecting Point.
5. In the event Battalion displaces forward, sufficient Medical personnel will remain at the Collecting Point to render emergency treatment until relieved by regimental Collection personnel.

b. Regiment:

1. Regimental Collecting Point to be in the vicinity of Regimental Command Post where Collecting Station will be set up.
2. Regimental Collecting personnel will complete evacuation of DZ to the Regimental Collecting Point after assembling on bundles.
3. Regimental Collecting personnel will with a minimum delay relieve Battalion Aid Station personnel of patient responsibility.
4. Regimental Clearing Station will be set up in the vicinity of the Regimental Command Post or near L-5 (liaison) plane strip for further evacuation.

Evacuation Medical facilities will be provided by the 801st Air Evacuation Squadron, KIMPO AIR BASE.⁶⁸

5. Separate Battalions will provide similar strips for evacuation in the vicinity of the Battalion Aid Station.

6. Litter jeeps will be used on a shuttle basis from the Battalions to the Regimental Collecting Station.

a. Each Battalion will have one jeep assigned for ambulance service within the Battalion.

c. Supply:

1. Medical resupply of Battalions will be through normal channels.
2. Emergency air resupply upon notification of the Regiment.
3. Separate Battalions will receive resupply daily by air drop.

d. Sanitation:

1. Subject Letter, "Sanitation and Disease Prevention," headquarters, 187th Regimental Combat Team, APO 660, dated 12 October 1950 will apply.

e. Miscellaneous:

1. Emergency treatment only of North Korean troops when American troops have been cared for.
2. Emergency treatment of civilian population to save life only.
3. All Medical personnel will wear brassards on jump and until assembly is complete.

PERSONNEL:⁶⁹

a. Strength, Records, and Reports:

1. Personnel Daily Summary (PDS).

Addressee commanders will consolidate and submit the PDS as of 1800 hours each day to reach S-1 this headquarters not later than 2100 hours. Telephonic transmission, using the line and column code, will be utilized insofar as practicable in rendering this report. Instructions contained in letter, this headquarters, Subject; "Instructions for the Preparation and Submission of the

Personnel Daily Summary," dated 6 October 1950, will be used as a guide for submission of this report. Form attached hereto as Appendix #1 will be utilized.

2. Personnel Periodic Report:

SOP - this headquarters only.

3. Station Lists:

SOP - this headquarters only.

4. Morning Reports:

a. Field Morning Reports will be consolidated and forwarded by battalions, separate companies, and detachments to the S-1 this headquarters not later than 0800 hours, following the reporting period.

b. Reference unnumbered Memorandum this headquarters Subject:

"Morning and Casualty Reports," dated 13 October 1950.

b. Personnel Procedures:

a. Officers:

(1) Recall of officers to active duty: SOP, contact S-1 this headquarters.

(2) Appointments and promotions: SOP, contact S-1 this headquarters with regard to appointment of enlisted personnel as 2nd Lieutenants, or promotion of officers.

b. Enlisted Men:

(1) Recommendations for promotion of enlisted personnel, combat injured, missing in action, prisoner of war, or interned may not be initiated subsequent to EDCMR from assigned unit. Promotion recommendations initiated prior to EDCMR will, under para 13, SR 615-5-1 continue to be processed as if such individual had not changed status.

(2) Reduction of Non-Commissioned Officers:

a. Authority has been granted to suspend for units in Korea, the requirements of para 5, SR 615-5-2 with respect to the reduction of Non-Commissioned Officers. In such cases recommendations for reduction will be submitted in writing to this headquarters in quadruplicate with recommendations of an investigating officer appointed by the unit.

c. **Replacements:**

A continuing estimate of the personnel level will be maintained by this headquarters and requisitions will be forwarded by this headquarters only.

d. **Discipline, Law and Order:**⁶⁹

1. **Straggler Line and Straggler Collection Points to be announced.**

a. Provost Marshall, this headquarters, will comply with instructions contained in directives of higher headquarters in disposition of stragglers.

b. Any stragglers or AWOLs apprehended by units of this command will be forwarded to Provost Marshall, this headquarters, under escort with the least practicable delay.

Jurisdiction involving personnel of the United States Military and ROK Nationals will be governed by the provisions of existing agreements between the Government of the United States and the Government of Korea.⁷⁰

2. **Prisoners of War.**

a. Location of RCT POW enclosure to be announced upon establishment.

b. Treatment of prisoners of war will be in accordance with directive of CINCFE in radio ZX 49955, dated 4 July 1950, which is quoted herewith in part: "Personnel of the Armed Forces of North Korea and the persons of North Korea who are taken custody or fall into the hands of armed forces now under CINCFE operational control in connection with hostilities in Korea will be treated in accordance with the humanitarian principles applied by and recognized by civilized

nations involved in armed conflict." North Korean prisoners taken by units of this command will not be released to South Korean Armed Forces, but will be evacuated to PW Collecting Point this headquarters.

c. Capturing unit will accomplish POW tags, to be obtained from Provost Marshall this headquarters.

d. Sick and wounded POWs will remain in medical channels until released to military Police.

e. Prisoners of War captured by Air Force Units will be delivered to the nearest Army Provost Marshall for custody.⁷¹

3. Reporting of Serious Incidents:

a. Any serious incidents involving personnel of this command will be forwarded to Provost Marshall, this headquarters, by the most expeditious means, followed by written report indicating the following: Name, grade, ASN, unit, nature of offense or incident, place, time, results and contemplated action. Incidents of this nature are: rape, murder, arson, larceny, assault and suicide.

MORALE AND PERSONNEL SERVICES:⁷²

a. Awards and Decorations:

1. Reference AR 600-45 as amended. All outstanding combat or related actions of merit by individuals resulting directly from the present emergency will be properly and promptly recognized. Records, lists, memoranda, or other substantiating data will be maintained.

2. Recommendations will be considered for the following medals:

- a. Medal of Honor
- b. Distinguished Service Cross
- c. Silver Star
- d. Legion of Merit

- e. Soldiers Medal
- f. Bronze Star
- g. Purple Heart (awarded through Medical channels)
- h. Commendation Ribbon

3. Recommendations will be forwarded to S-1, this headquarters in five copies on DA AGO Form 639 (Recommendation for Award Heroism) or DA AGO Form 638 (Recommendation for Award Meritorious Service) as soon as practicable after accomplishment of the act or deed. Forms are available at the headquarters.

b. Leave:

1. Morale, ordinary and reenlistment leaves are temporarily suspended. Emergency leave to the ZI will be granted only by CINCFE and only for reasons of extreme compassion or hardship.

c. Mail:

1. Free mailing privilege to be continued.
2. APO 660 will continue to be used as address of this command.
3. As soon as practicable and in accordance with the tactical situation mail will be distributed to all units with rations or by other means.

CIVIL AFFAIRS:⁷³

a. Refugees: The following procedure will be adhered to by all commands relative to the flow or movement of all refugees in battle areas and rear areas.

- 1. No refugees will be permitted to cross battle lines at any time.
- 2. Movement of all Koreans in groups will not be permitted.
- 3. No areas will be evacuated by Koreans without direct order from the Army Commander or upon order of the RCT Commander, and will be through Provost Marshal channels.

4. There will be absolutely no movement of Korean civilians, as individuals or in groups, in battle areas or rear areas after the hours of darkness.

5. To accomplish the procedures outlined above, leaflets have been and will be dropped in all areas forward and rear of the battle lines to effectively disseminate this information.

CASUALTY REPORTS: (FEC FORM 241)

a. Casualty Reports will be prepared by the unit of which the casualty was a member. Report will be prepared in one copy, in ink or typewriter if possible, and forwarded to the S-1, this headquarters with the least practicable delay, but in no case more than 24 hours after the incident occurred. Reports will then be forwarded up to UPO for completion and distribution as follows: Work sheet and one copy will be returned to the unit originating the report, 1 copy to S-1 files, 1 copy to RCT Chaplain (in case of death only), and five copies will be forwarded to the AG Casualty Branch of the next higher headquarters.

b. Reference Unnumbered memorandum this headquarters, Subject: "Morning and Casualty Reports," dated 13 October 1950 for instructions governing preparation of reports.

c. Reports Form - See Appendix 2 attached hereto.

Casualty Reports will be submitted in accordance with Air Force Regulation 30-11 and Letter, Headquarters, FEAFF, subject "Casualty Reports" dated 2 October 1950, file AG 704 PERS-MF-1. In addition, a casualty summary report (RCS: CCC-AP-2) will be submitted to reach this Headquarters by 1000 hours daily to cover the period of 0001 hours to 2400 hours of the previous day. Negative reports will include the following information.

- a. Combat Casualties.
- b. Casualties resulting from other causes.
- c. Total Casualties.

c. Casualties:⁷⁴ On the initial day of the drop, 2860 paratroopers made the jump. A total of 36 men were injured with only one fatality, which was caused by enemy fire.⁷⁵

The Medical Company immediately started collecting Medical bundles and caring for those injured in the jump. A combination Collecting and Clearing Station was set up at the north end of the drop zone, sheltered by the dykes of the Ch'oeryong River. However, no method of evacuation was as yet available. The actual number of jump injuries on DZ William was 35. The Second Battalion on DZ Easy had 20 injuries.⁷⁶

The Command Post group departed Kimpo in aircraft number 1 and 20; they jumped on DZ William and suffered no casualties. The RCT CP was initially established on the North edge of the DZ and then moved within an hour to 280.651, Chang'ni. The American Flag was raised and a POW inclosure established in the vicinity of the CP.

At 1000 on the second day of the assault, 21 October, 1,093 men of the 187th were dropped on the Sukchon drop zone from twenty-four C-119's.

Also at 1000 on 21 October, 40 C-119 aircraft carrying 220 tons of vehicles, rations, ammunition, water and lubricants as well as 774 parachutists landed on the drop zone. These supplies and men were particularly needed. The reinforcements to the First Battalion arrived at 1020 hours in the First Battalion area. The reinforcements of the Third Battalion enabled the Battalion Commander to reinforce Company "D" with one platoon of Company "L." The reinforcements for the Second Battalion assembled on Hill 97 and were placed under the command of 1LT Mc'Govern, the ranking man present. At 1600 hours they dug in on the hill overlooking Sukchon as it was not feasible to send them to Sunchon.

At 1000 on 21 October, a patrol from the 2nd Battalion discovered the bodies of seventy-five slain American PW's in the vicinity of Myonguch'am. At the same

time fifteen wounded POW's were liberated. In questioning the survivors, it was learned that they had been shot at 1000 on 20 October.

At 1630 on 21 October Chaplain Holland Hope performed burial services for the first three soldiers who died in action in this campaign. The men were buried in their parachutes. Headquarters Company furnished the flag escort.

On 21 October the Medical Company carried on evacuation by helicopter and L-5 aircraft throughout the day. The carrying capacity of the helicopter was two while that of the light aircraft was one injured person. At approximately 1500 hours the Collecting Station and Clearing Platoons separated with the Collecting Station remaining on the drop zone caring for four wounded who were the first to be evacuated the next day. The Clearing Platoon moved approximately twenty patients to a Korean Hospital in Sukchon. In the evening the Collecting Station was under enemy fire and this fact necessitated the removal of the four remaining patients to the Clearing Platoon. During the night of 21 October the Medical Company took three prisoners and killed several North Koreans who attempted to infiltrate the area.

The 22nd of October was the busiest day for the Medical Company. The Collecting Station displaced from Drop Zone William and combined again with the Clearing Platoon in the North Korean Hospital in Sukchon. The casualties were moderately heavy, but almost immediate evacuation was obtained by means of helicopter and light aircraft which diminished greatly the mortality rate of the RCT. At approximately 1700 hours all patients who were tagged for immediate evacuation had been evacuated from the airhead. Those remaining were not seriously injured.

On 23 October the Medical Company evacuated all remaining casualties except nine who had minor injuries. These nine casualties were scheduled for motor evacuation in conjunction with the complete move of the RCT the next day.

D. AWARDS AND DECORATIONS

Private First Class Richard G. Wilson, Medical Company, 187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team was attached to Company "T" as a Medical Aideman. On 21 October he accompanied the unit on a reconnaissance in force through hill country near Opari, Korea. The main body of the company was passing through a narrow valley flanked on three sides by high hills, when the enemy laid down a barrage of mortar, automatic weapons, and small arms fire. The company suffered a large number of casualties from intense hostile fire while fighting its way out of the ambush, and PFC Wilson proceeded at once to move among the wounded and administer aid to them, oblivious of the danger to himself, and constantly exposing himself to enemy fire. The company commander ordered a withdrawal as the enemy threatened to encircle and isolate the company. As the unit withdrew, PFC Wilson assisted the wounded men to safety and made sure that none were left behind. After the company had pulled back, he learned that one of the men, previously believed to be dead, had been seen moving and attempting to crawl to safety. Although his comrades protested it, PFC Wilson returned, unarmed, to search for the wounded man who had been left behind. Two days later a patrol found him lying beside the man he had returned to aid. He had been shot several times while trying to shield and administer aid to the wounded "Trooper." For his supreme self-sacrifice, Private First Class Richard Wilson was posthumously awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.⁷⁷

On 16 November the Combat Medical Badge was awarded to all personnel of the Medical Company with the exception of those who made up the land tail.⁷⁸

E. POWS.

Prisoners of War proved a difficult problem for the 187th Regimental Combat Team. After being cut off, the enemy troops would change into civilian clothing and hide or even stand in front of the houses in Sukchon waving a South Korean

flag. Then, at night, the men of the 187th had to dodge the bullets of "civilians." The Republic of Korean troops of General Kim were able to distinguish between true civilians and soldiers in hiding. The Military Police Detachment under the command of 1Lt Gledford E. Davis operated a Prisoner of War Enclosure near Sukchon. In the end a total of approximately 600 old men were released and 800 Communist "Civilians," together with all captured North Korean Soldiers were turned over to the 24th United States Infantry Division. About 20 United Nations sympathizers were utilized in the segregation of the North Korean Prisoners of War. A total of 3,818 North Korean Prisoners of War were taken by the 187th RCT.⁷⁹

IV. THE FIGHT

A. Chronology of Events

TUESDAY

17 October 1950

Colonel Bowen, commander of the 187th RCT, called a meeting for general and special staff officers at 0800 hours. He announced that the 187th RCT had been alerted for an airborne operation north of P'yongyang on Saturday, 21 October 1950. The time, place, and exact location of the drop zone and planned missions of the battalions were discussed at this meeting. The XO (LTC Gerhart) announced that the land tail would leave at the same time as the aircraft. The deadline for loading vehicles was set for midnight Friday, 20 October 1950. All officers were cautioned that space was critical. Staff section plans were ordered to be in on 17 October 1950 by 1200 hours. Activities took on a feverish tempo. Staff sections and units worked into the night preparing manifests.⁸⁰

WEDNESDAY

18 October 1950

While ground troops of the 8th Army approached P'yongyang, the work of the 187th RCT focused on preparation for the coming operation. Two possible objectives were still possible to include Anju and Sukchon-Sunchon. Maps were prepared; further, passwords were distributed for a six day period. To assist in tactical planning, a sand table of the Sukchon drop zone was completed. At 1645 hours Scotch 3 (Ten Corps Operations) called requesting that Colonel Bowen report to General Wright, with maps and plans. At 1630 hours, LTC Gerhart, anticipating that D-day would be moved forward, stated that the land train time schedule would remain unchanged. Colonel Bowen returned with the news that due to the rapid advance of the 8th Army, already on the outskirts of P'yongyang, the objective was to be Anju, with the mission of intercepting North Korean high officials fleeing the

city. D-day was set for 20 October 1950 - one day earlier than had been anticipated. Major Gormlie, S-2, departed immediately to HQ 10th Corps to secure more maps. Units and staff sections began last minute packing. Morale soared.⁸¹

THURSDAY

19 October 1950

The 187th completed packing this day. When it became apparent that the Eighth Army was making slower progress than anticipated on the previous day, the 187th mission objective was changed to Sukchon-Sunchon. At 0800 hours barracks bags and sleeping bags were packed and stacked by companies for transport by the overland train. This task was completed by 1600 hours. Companies issued ammunition; further, soldiers were issued three days rations: one for the 19th, D-day, and D-1. The units then completed packing their heavy drop equipment. Troop briefings were held by the individual companies. Company C, for example, lost one aircraft, meaning that one platoon, and a portion of company equipment, had to remain behind. Consequently, all the loads in each aircraft in the company, had to be redistributed. If a greater aircraft safety factor had been used, (more supernumerary craft), it meant only a last minute substitution. Further, aircraft loading difficulties were compounded because it was difficult to plan on an exact payload for the same type aircraft. The mean figure used for planning purposes (15,500 pounds) could not be depended upon since each aircraft was assigned an individual maximum payload by the safety inspectors at the date of the last inspection. Between 1900 hours and 2000 hours briefings were held for pilots and jumpmasters in a hangar at Kimpo, AFB. Separate briefings were held for Drop Zone Easy (Sunchon) and Drop Zone William (Sukchon). At the joint pilot jumpmasters briefing, it was announced that in the event of bad weather the jump would be delayed by three hour periods. If the jump were postponed for two successive periods and the weather

was still bad, the operation would be cancelled for the day. Colonel Bowen announced the news that P-hour was set for 1100 hours.⁸²

FRIDAY

20 October 1950

Revielle was held at 0200 hours in the rain. The men were formed by plan loads in stick order and shuttled to Kimpo AFB. At 0400 hours drawing and fitting of parachutes began. Before each man had fitted his chute, word was received that the jump would be postponed for three hours. (It was later learned that a train containing communist party officials and American POW's had already departed from P'yongyang). At 0700 hours the drop was delayed another three hours. Finally, at 1030 hours, the order was given to "chute up." Except for the fact that each man knew that this was real, the preparations were similar to any training exercise. However, a close examination revealed that the aircraft were filled to capacity. A typical C-119 type aircraft, #17 as an example, carried two sticks of twenty-three men each, fifteen monorail bundles, and four door bundles. The ship was so full that some of the men had to sit on the floor. Each man, besides a main parachute and a reserve, carried a light pack, water, rations, ammunition, a .45 caliber pistol, and a carbine or M-1 rifle. Some men carried extra griswold containers filled with small arms or light mortar ammunition. At 1100 hours (station time) the troops were ready and the first aircraft, commanded by Colonel Bowen, was airborne at 1200 hours. Each aircraft followed successively. The planes were so heavily loaded that some fuselages scraped the ground on take off.⁸⁴

The armada of 73 (seven had been scratched) C-119's of the 314th commanded by Colonel E. W. Hampton from Ashiya AFB, Kyushu, Japan and 40 C-47's of the 21st Troop Carrier Squadron from Brady AFB, Kyushu, flew over the Han River Estuary (to rendezvous) before proceeding north along the west coast of Korea to

the Sukchon-Sunchon area. At 1355 hours the airborne force turned east on the base leg approach to the drop areas. At eight minutes out (1357 hours), the normal doors were opened, door bundles pushed out into the slip stream, and held in place by the first man in each stick. At four minutes out (1401 hours) the red light was on. The command was given "stand up and hook up." Sticks were checked. Ahead US attack aircraft could be seen preparing the drop zone; there was no flak. The green light came on and within a short minute the troop aircraft debouched approximately seventy-four tons of equipment, and 1,470 men from the first two serials. The maneuver apparently caught the enemy by surprise as attested to by the lack of anti-aircraft fire; no troop landing received any sniper fire. Upon landing individuals formed quickly into small units of squad and platoon size; these elements then headed for the high ground overlooking and controlling the DZ.⁸⁴

The drop serials comprised 17 C-119 type aircraft and carried the following units:

1st Battalion
Regimental headquarters and Headquarters Company
Support Company
Company A, 127th Engineer Battalion
Medical Company
Service Company
Forward Air Control Party (1 ea.)

The 1st Battalion was assigned to the following mission:

Clear Sukchon of enemy forces
Secure the high ground north of Sukchon
Establish a roadblock at 234690
Prevent enemy withdrawal to the north
Patrol north to the river in the vicinity of Sinanju
(240860)
Contact the 2nd Battalion in the vicinity of Maemam-ni
(396680)
Be prepared to move south toward P'yongyang on order
Designate one company to be RCT reserved on landing

After assembling, companies "A" and "B" pushed northwest to take hill 104 overlooking the town of Mail-ri. There were approximately 1800 enemy in Sukchon and the terrain north of the town. Using mortar fire and a preplanned air strikes, Company

C secured Hill 97. Company C then reverted to regimental reserve and remained on Hill 97. At 1550 hours the 1st Battalion opened its command post at coordinates 265647. After assembly, the first platoon, Company A, 127th Engineer Battalion, proceeded north to the rear of Company B, reaching the town of Songnani-ni (270646) at 1530 hours. They were delayed 45 minutes by enemy fire in the town of Sukchon. During the action fifteen POW's were taken by SFC Marcuson and his squad. At 1745 hours the platoon reached Namil-li (247662) where they captured an additional sixteen POW's and killed five enemy soldiers. The platoon joined Company B in the vicinity of Poegun-san (242681) at 2130 hours.⁸⁵

At 1410 hours the 187th Regimental Headquarters and Headquarters Company assembled along the dykes by the Ch'oeryong River; at 1600 hours the RCT command post was dug in and secured.⁸⁶

The battalion commander of the 647th Field Artillery Battalion, LTC Harry F. Lambert, jumped from the first aircraft with Colonel Bowen, and met members of the battalion as they came off the drop zone in the vicinity of 280648. He directed that 1Lt Baker, commanding C Battery, and CPT Morton, commanding A Battery, place their batteries in the vicinity of coordinates 273649 and 279649, respectively. 1Lt Josia H. Wallace established an observation post on hill 97. At 1415 hours serial #4 dropped seven howitzers, seven jeeps, and 1125 rounds of ammunition for the 647th FA Battalion. Of these, six howitzers and six jeeps were in usable condition. The chutes of one howitzer and one jeep, belonging to C Battery, left the plane, but failed to extract the howitzer and jeep. The howitzer was completely demolished and the jeep had a broken axle. The ammunition delivered by the heavy drop was on pallets (24 rounds per pallet). By 1500 hours, Battery C had two howitzers in position, on the drop zone, (272641) ready to fire. At 1540 hours Battery A had four howitzers in position and had completed a registration. Six missions were fired on D-day by these two batteries, using about sixty rounds

of ammunition. By nightfall, about five hundred rounds of ammunition were on hand in the battalion area.⁸⁷

The 3rd Battalion, commanded by LTC Delbert E. Munson, dropped on DZ William in the two serials (#6 under the command of LTC Munson and #7 under the command of Major Rysert W. Mauser the XO). The 3rd Battalion had the following missions:⁸⁸

- .Land by parachute D-day on DZ William
- .Seize and secure Objective 2
- .Prevent enemy withdrawal to the north or resupply to the south
- .Establish roadblock at (260610)
- .Be prepared to move south toward P'yongyang on order

At 1630 hours the 3rd Battalion was positioned between coordinates 270618 and 283625. By 1700 hours the battalion had secured all its objectives and was prepared to resume the attack south along the railroad and road to P'yongyang. The battalion was disposed on the high ground 3,000 yards south of Sukchon. Company I was on the left half of the defensive position, Company K was on the right half, and had established a road block on the Sukchon-P'yongyang road. Company L was in reserve. As yet, no casualties were suffered by the 3rd Battalion. During their initial action forty-two POW's were captured and five enemy were killed. The third platoon, Company "A," 127th Engineer Battalion, attached to the third battalion, was further attached to Company K and placed on the railroad tracks south of Sukchon where it ambushed eighty enemy soldiers, killing six.⁸⁹

At 14200 hours the second battalion and the following units drooped on DZ Easy in the vicinity of Sunchon:

.Second platoon, Company A, 1127th Engineer Battalion
.4.2" mortar platoon of Support Company
.90mm anti-tank section (1 ea.)
.Battery B, 647th Field Artillery Battalion
.Second Pathfinder Team
.Forward Air Control Party (1 ea.)

The battalion made contact with the enemy at this time, moved out, and secured its objectives with marked success. Company E seized the town of Changsan-ni (510646), and proceeded to establish a road block on the bridge across the Kumchon River, south of Sinhung-ni (515645). Company F attacked toward the town of Sunchon and encountered scattered sniper fire. The 2nd battalion command post was located in a small village south of Chung-ni (506656). Company G remained in battalion reserve, with one platoon securing a road block on the bridge over the Kumchon River west of Toran-dong (482659). The 2nd Battalion had the following missions:⁹⁰

.Land by parachute on D-day on DZ Easy
.Seize and secure Objective 3
.Clear Sunchon (525675)
.Secure foot bridge east of Sunchon
.Prevent enemy withdrawal to the north or resupply to the south
.Contact ROK or X Corps troop vic Unsan-ni (600641)
.Contact 1st Battalion vic Maenam-ni (396680)
.Be prepared to move south toward P'yongyang on order

Battery B had two $\frac{1}{2}$ ton trucks and two howitzers dropped from the heavy drop serial. One vehicle had a broken drive shaft, (later repaired) and the other had a bent wheel. One howitzer became detached from its chute and was a complete loss; the other had the right shield sheared off, but was otherwise operable. The operative howitzer was in position (507649) and ready to fire in fifty minutes from the time it dropped. Six hundred rounds were recovered from the drop zone in usable condition and the battery fired two missions the first day.⁹¹

The 2nd platoon, Company A, 127th Engineer Battalion, was unable to prepare the bridge across the Kumchon River, south of Sinhung-ni, for demolitions because it was under enemy fire. The platoon was then ordered to accompany Company F

to the outskirts of Sunchon and reconnoiter a railroad bridge. On the way into Sunchon the platoon received fired from the 6th ROK Division. (once contact was established the firing ceased). With exception of intermittent shelling observed to the far south, east, and west of Hill 97, the night of 20 October passed without event.⁹²

Colonel F. S. Bowen Jr. was promoted to the rank of Brigadier General on this date but did not find out until the next day.

SATURDAY

21 October 1950

At 0700 hours the 1st and 3rd Battalions continued the attack. However, the enemy still had shown no organized resistance owing to surprise achieved by the drop. The 187th RCT had dropped across one of the enemy's major defensive lines indicated by extensive dug in positions and large quantities of military stores. The night of 20 October 1950 had found the 187th RCT on the strategic offensive and the tactical defensive. Now, the 187th was assuming the tactical offensive.⁹³

The 1st Battalion continued the attack to seize the high ground north of Sukchon. Company A captured hill 142 (2568), encountering only light resistance. Company B captured hill 126 (4268) at 0830 hours also encountering only light resistance. Company A captured hill 73 (252698) and was then stopped by enemy forces. At 1230 hours an air strike was conducted on hills 116, 93, 76, and 175 the next ridge line to the north. At 1310 hours the commander of Company B requested artillery fires on Tojang-ni (2767). About this time, LTC Arthur H. Wilson, commanding the 1st Battalion, ordered the front line companies to take hills 76 (239707), 175 (255709), and 68 (228702) to hold their position, and to dig in. More than seventy-five enemy soldiers armed with rifles and light machine guns were dug in around the southern slope of hill 76. To the rear of hill 76, approximately one

section of 82mm mortars harrassed A company's front line positions. Further, a high velocity self-propelled gun supported enemy forces from vicinity Tungnyong-ni (236718). At 1715 hours the 1st Battalion CP opened at the base of hill 76. Company C remained in regimental reserve; however, one of its platoons was sent out to establish contact with a patrol from the 2nd Battalion at Sunchon. The platoon followed the road from Sukchon northeast to Maenam-ni (395680) then east to Sunchon. Contact was established at 1830 hours on Drop Zone Easy.⁹⁴

The 1st platoon, Company A, 127th Engineers sent the first squad to Sukchon to escort thirty-one prisoners to the POW enclosures at 0545 hours. The second and third squads returned to Sukchon at 0930 hours and established road blocks on the road and railroad leading south from Sukchon to P'yongyang. A detail from the first platoon was sent to clean Sukchon of abandoned enemy arms.⁹⁵

In the early morning, at 0230 hours, the Company K road block on the Sukchon P'yongyang road was attacked by an estimated company sized enemy force who attempted to break through and open up an escape route to the north. The attack was repulsed with the enemy sustaining five killed and seventeen POW's taken (12 of whom were wounded).⁹⁶

At 0900 hours two company combat teams moved south along the railroad and road to P'yongyang. Company I was assigned the mission of making a reconnaissance in force to clear the railroad and Company K was given the mission of making a reconnaissance in force to clear the main road. Company I proceeded without opposition to Opari (277559) where it was attacked at 1300 hours by an enemy force of one battalion. This battalion was reinforced with heavy 120mm mortars and 40mm guns. After a 2½ hour fire fight, two platoons of I company were over-run by the enemy. The company, with ninety men missing, was forced to withdraw to the high ground along hill 281 (261563). The enemy, failing to take advantage of

the situation, withdrew to their former positions on the high ground around Opari (277559) and Sinopa (286556).⁹⁷

Company K, receiving only harrassing fire from the enemy, proceeded down the main road to a point about 1500 meters from Yongyu (244531). They encountered an enemy force numbering about 3 companies. After, a sharp, heavy fire fight succeeded, the enemy was forced to withdraw south and east of Yongyu. Company K continued into Yongyu and took up positions on the high ground (hill 63) north of the town. During this period the enemy was apparently reconstituting its forces in the area long hills 138, 300, and 192 in grid squares 2532 and 5453. The enemy, who by this time were apparently convinced that both routes to the north had been blocked by airborne forces, would reconstitute and attempt one last push in an effort to regain contact with other North Korean Forces who had infiltrated northward. Because of the severe casualites already sustained, the enemy was forced to leave behind large quantities of ammunition and supplies, including thirty-four 82mm mortars. These weapons were new and a number of them were still in packing grease.⁹⁸

At 1845 hours Company K made contact with a lieutenant and sergeant from the United Kingdom's 27th Commonwealth Brigade in Yongyu. Contact with the British was expected when the RCT commander had notified LTC Munson at 1545 hours that elements of the 27th Bde were on the other side of Yongyu (at coordinates 204481). At 2400 hours, 21 October 1950, the 3rd Battalion was disposed as follows:

- .Headquarters and CP hill 287 (260564)
- .Company I hill 287 (260564)
- .Company K hill 163 (245539)
- .90mm anti-tank gun section (232540)

The 67th Field Artillery Battalion continued to support the advance of the 1st battalion to the north of Sukchon and the 3rd Battalion to the south. Aerial resupply brought in two more howitzers for Battery C now in position at 275648. Two

captured GAZ-51 (Russian manufactured) trucks were used to move the howitzers. During the day each battery fired about seventy rounds at small groups of North Korean soldiers. No ammunition was dropped on 21 October as each battery still had over 550 rounds on hand. CPT Monical, the liaison officer with the 3rd Battalion, fired several missions on enemy infantry assembling on hill 231 until the hill was secured by 3rd battalion forces. At 1530 hours, Battery C moved two guns to a position about 3,000 yards north of Yongyi to provide support for the 3rd Battalion; however, because of a lack of local security, they were pulled back to the battalion position area before night fall. At about 2000 hours 1LT Eum (C Battery forward observer) fired a counterbattery mission in the vicinity of 247710 and knocked out an artillery piece firing on A company's position (252697).⁹⁹

Little change was recorded in the position of the companies in the 2nd Battalion at Sunchon. At 1000 hours a patrol from Company F discovered the bodies of seventy-five American POW's and eighteen other wounded American POW's. Questioning of the wounded prisoners revealed that the atrocity had occurred 20 October 1950. Ironically, if the weather not delayed the jump, all might have been saved.¹⁰⁰

At 1000 hours, 40 C-119 aircraft carrying 220 tons of vehicles, rations, ammunition, water and lubricants - as well as 774 reinforcements - landed on the drop zone. Battery B, 88th Anti-aircraft battalion was among the reinforcements. They assembled on the DZ and set up a perimeter for the night. Between 2000-2400 hours, 21 October, forty-three enemy were killed by the battery at a road block on the railroad bridge sough of Sukchon, using ground mounted 50 caliber machine guns.¹⁰¹

Support Company's mortar platoon, under the command of 1LT Morgan J. Murphy, moved from hill 97 at 1500 hours to the north and provided direct support

to the 1st battalion. The platoon went into position on hill 73 (250695) at 1800 hours and fired harrassing fire and countermortar fire throughout the night.¹⁰²

SUNDAY

22 October 1950

Around 0200 hours the 1st Battalion's ammunition dump, located on the drop zone, was attacked by approximately forty enemy soldiers armed with submachine guns and rifles. After a thirty minute fight the enemy withdrew to the southwest, leaving seven dead. At 0915 hours the 1st Battalion locations were as follows:¹⁰³

.C Company-now released from regimental reserve-hill 142(255681)
.A Company-hill 73
.B Company-hill 76 (239708)
.CP-(258666)

The 3rd Battalion, located south of Sukchon, held the same positions occupied on the evening of 21 October. At 0015 hours Company K's position on the high ground north and east of Yongyu, and the road block on the northern outskirts of Yongyu, were attacked by an enemy force estimated to be two battalions of the 239th Regiment one of the last completely organized units to withdraw from P'yongyang. The mission of the 239th was to defend the area around Yongyu from any attack from the south or east; extensive preparations in the area confirmed this mission. Because of the quantity of stores and weapons located in the area, the enemy appeared prepared to fight a prolonged delaying action. A small group of 239th Regiment succeeded in infiltrating Company K's command post, wounding the CO and XO; however, after a sharp fire fight, they were repulsed. After reorganizing on the base of the hill the enemy attacked again at 0115 this attack was also repulsed. At 0230 hours the enemy suffered severe losses during a third attack. After the third attack, the commander of the road block notified Major Mausert (Bn XO) his force had depleted their ammunition, and this force was ordered to withdraw to the north. The enemy attacked once again at 0400 hours, leaving

a small force to contain Company K, and concentrated the majority of its force along the road to Sukchon. A short time after the main body moved through, the remaining enemy elements withdrew from the attack and moved north to join the main body. The enemy then moved north along the road, arriving at a point 1000 yards south of the 3rd Battalion's CP (around 0500 hours). The enemy stopped to reform, not realizing that HHC and L Company were in position along the road. Around 0545 hours, the enemy started moving north and came into contact with the perimeter elements of the 3rd Battalion CP. They were immediately engaged, not only by the CP elements, but also by flanking fire from L Company. Stunned by the volume and severity of the fire, as well as heavy casualties, it took them about an hour to reorganize and deliver any type of organized attack. A group of about 350 enemy engaged L Company and attempted to flank and develop their positions. Another group of about 450 enemy engaged HHC. The enemy fire became exceedingly accurate as the fire fight progressed. Eventually, a request for armored assistance was sent to the 27th Commonwealth Brigade. At 1030 hours the leading elements of the 27th Brigade, consisting of a company of tanks and an Australian Infantry Battalion, were sighted by US forces. Within a half hour of severe, close combat, they were able to advance forward and to relieve the 3rd Battalion CP. The Australian Battalion then pursued a disorganized and retreating enemy to the east. At 0830 hours, in the midst of the fire fight, LTC Musnson was seriously wounded. Major Murray assumed command pending the arrival of Major Mausert, the XO, who was with Company K. At 1130 hours Mausert assumed command of the battalion and orders were issued to move to the vicinity of the postions held on 20 October. The force that attacked the 3rd Battalion was estimated to be over 2,500 men. Of this number, 805 were killed and 681 were taken prisoner.¹⁰⁴

At 0330 hours, LT Nyquist, an artillery observer, with K Company, called for fire on approximately 300 North Koreans observed assembling in the town of Yongyu.

However, the howitzers of C Battery had been returned to their original position and were not available to fire. The battalion commander immediately ordered LT Simkins to take two guns of C Battery south of Sukchon, near 252262, to provide support for the battalion. After fighting his way past machine guns and rifle fire, 1LT Simkins moved his platoon into the prescribed position. The two howitzers, emplaced about 15 yards apart, with the FDC in between, were ready to fire by 0415 hours. By 0500 hours these two guns had fired 145 rounds. On one particular fire mission, 54 enemy were killed. At 1000 hours, C Battery displaced its other two guns to a position near 269590 and fired several more missions in support of the 3rd Battalion. C Battery pulled back to its original position. When 3rd Battalion was relieved by the 27th Commonwealth Brigade at 1400 hours, C Battery had killed about 200 of the enemy during this action.¹⁰⁵

The mortar platoon of Support Company fired harrassing fire from 2400 hours 21 October until 0400 hours 22 October when a low supply of ammunition forced them to cease firing. At 0845 hours 1LT Murphy was ordered to move his platoon back to a position on a hill near U-ri (241672).¹⁰⁶

The early morning hours of 22 October were busy for the troops in the vicinity of Sukchon. Small groups of North Koreans attempted to penetrate the road blocks at the railway and highway bridges at 0200 hours. The anti-tank and mine platoon and the Security platoon opened fire with automatic weapons, forcing groups of the enemy to withdraw to the south. At 0300 hours the Intelligence and Reconnaissance platoon opened fire and again forced enemy groups to withdraw.¹⁰⁷

The Regimental Supply Point was struck on the west by North Koreans at 0230 hours. This was the same time that the 3rd Battalion and the road blocks south of Sukchon were hit. The supply men drove off the enemy, killing sixteen.¹⁰⁸

MONDAY

23 October 1950

The morning of 23 October saw the 187th RCT remaining in defensive positions and preparing to move to the vicinity of P'yongyang.

The 1st Battalion remained in its same location without coming into contact with the enemy.

The 2nd Battalion moved at 0700 hours, by marching from the bivouac area at Sunchon to Sukchon. Approximately 6 miles from Sukchon the battalion was alerted for motor movement to the vicinity of P'yongyang. At 1700 hours the truck convoy departed; the 2nd Battalion arrived in the new area at 2400 hours.¹⁰⁹

A patrol from the 647th Field Artillery Battalion, lead by Sergeant James C. Burrough of HHB, captured two trucks, thirty-two prisoners, seven 14.5mm anti-tank rifles, and large quantities of ammunition in the hills, vicinity (2767). At 2000 hours the 647th FA liaison section with the 1st Battalion, commanded by CPT Olsen, captured twenty North Korean soldiers, eight 82 mm mortars, and two 120mm mortars.¹¹⁰

TUESDAY

24 October 1950

The Regimental Headquarters was located at (283645) hill 97 overlooking Drop Zone William. At 0730 hours the CP was alerted to move to the city of P'yongyang. The 1st Battalion, located vicinity 245651, departed in trucks from Sukchon to P'yongyang via Sunchon.

After departing from the old area at 1500 hours, the 3rd Battalion arrived in the new bivouac area at 2100 hours. The 647th FA Battalion left Sukchon at 1100 hours and arrived in P'yongyang at approximately 1600 hours.¹¹¹

COMMUNICATIONS

The primary lessons learned from the 187th RCT can be grouped into three categories; the first lesson involved equipment. The airborne operations clearly demonstrated that new light-weight, rugged, long-range communications gear and reliable VHF air-to-ground radios was needed. Second, in the area of training, the primary lesson learned was that army personnel should be trained in the use of tactical air-to-ground radios and in the marking and visual identification of drop zones. Moreover, training should include the communication aspects of aerial resupply operations. Last, this operation emphasized the need for extensive joint communications planning between the Army, Air Force, and Allied forces to facilitate complicated multi-national link-up operations, airborne operations, and resupply operations.

THE OUTCOME

During this operation, the 187th RCT seized the key communication centers of Sukchon and Sunchon, cut the main railroads and highways to Sinanju, Anju, and Kunu-ri, trapped the enemy forces defending P'yongyang. During the operation the 187th RCT engaged approximately 6,000 enemy troops, and killed an estimated 2,764 captured some 3,000 prisoners, and liberated 15 UN POW's. Additionally, US troops captured large stores of winter clothing and ammunition in the Sukchon-Sunchon area. Total casualties sustained by the RCT in this operation were 48 killed in action, 80 wounded in action, one soldier died and 36 were injured in the jump.¹¹²

B. SUMMARY OF TACTICAL OPERATION.

The 187th RCT accomplished all its missions except two which included:

- .Capture important North Korean military and civilian officials
- .Perform such POW liberation raids as can be accomplished without jeopardizing the primary missions

If the weather had not delayed the mission these two missions probably would have been accomplished.

The 187th RCT enjoyed a number of advantages in the battle to include:

- .Excellent organization-adherence to Unity of Command
- .Concentration of combat power and combined arms operations
- .Superior logistical support
- .Stronger unit cohesion and high morale
- .Tactical air support
- .Surprise

The 187th RCT followed every principle of war:

<u>Objective</u>	.Established clearly defined, decisive, and attainable objectives
<u>Offensive</u>	.Seized, retained, and exploited initiative
<u>Mass</u>	.Concentrated combat power (combined arms) at the decisive place and time
<u>Economy of Force</u>	.Allocated minimum essential combat power to secondary efforts
<u>Maneuver</u>	.Placed the enemy in a position of disadvantage through the flexible application on combat power
<u>Unity of Command</u>	.For every objective, unity of effort was under one responsible commander
<u>Security</u>	.Never permitted the enemy to acquire an unexpected advantage
<u>Simplicity</u>	.Prepared clear, uncomplicated plans and clear, concise orders to insure thorough understanding
<u>Surprise</u>	.Achieved complete surprise

The North Koreans seemed to violate every western principle of war. They received no logistical or tactical support, were disorganized and suffered from extremely low morale. Their greatest failure was to attack in piece-meal fashion rather than to maneuver and concentrate forces at the decisive place and time.

C. LESSONS LEARNED

While the mission proved successful, many valuable lessons learned were identified from the planning and conduct of operations as discussed previously.¹¹³

1. Personnel who loaded aircraft were not, in all cases, properly trained. Hence the 20 hour loading time allowed might not have been sufficient. The actual

delay of 6 hours in the scheduled drop hours, permitted personnel to check the loading of aircraft and to correct most errors.

2. The particular formation used was probably too tight, resulting in some collisions, entanglements, etc. Thus, more experimentation in formations for heavy drops is needed.

3. Communications were the main shortcomings of the operation. The RCT was unable to communicate with the British prior to link-up (frequencies used by British and RCT were mutually exclusive) and they could not reach Corps with the sets available.

4. Planning of the operation would have been smoother if the 187th and 314th had been in the same physical location. As it was, the 314th was in Ashiya and the 187th in Kimpo.

5. The 3rd Battalion nearly ran out of ammunition. Good communication with Kimpo would have helped to ensure adequate replenishment of ammunition.

6. An SOP for loading of heavy drop equipment should be developed so that Combat Cargo Command could help in loading and inspection.

7. The operation would have been aided by more planning time, better communications, and more ground transportation.

8. More training in the fundamentals governing use of TAC Air is necessary.

9. The AN-TRC 7 is not adequate for airborne operations. It is recommended that at least a 4 channel, portable, VHF radio set be developed for use by airborne Tactical Air Control Parties.

10. The 90mm is probably too bulky for airborne operations. The 105 howitzer is the heaviest field artillery piece required.

11. Airborne anti-aircraft battalions are not properly equipped. The wheels on the quads are too small and the towed 40's are too bulky. They are hard to remove from the DZ.

12. Due to lack of aircraft it was not possible to drop sufficient transport equipment of the right type. More 3/4 ton trucks were needed and more jeeps were needed for transporting the 75mm recoilless gun.

13. More attention must be devoted to the local security of the FA battery positions. .30 caliber light machine guns should be made a part of the TOE of the artillery battery. Further, more thought must be given to local security of the battery position by service schools so that standard doctrine can be developed.

14. During the planning phase the S-2 should:

- .Recommend plans of action to obtain intelligence through use of the I & R Platoon.
- .Request 72 hour weather forecasts prior to D-day.
- .Secure adequate operational supplies for sustained combat.
- .Obtain (if available) and assign interpreters to subordinate units.
- .Set up definite procedures for handling and processing of prisoners of war.
- .Plan for immediate questioning of local inhabitants for enemy information.
- .Secure and distribute climatological data for area of operations; also long range weather forecasts.
- .Secure photo interpretations including defense overprints of objective area.

15. During the preparation phase the S-2 should:

- .Request aerial photos of the DZ's and surrounding areas.
- .Obtain OB information from all units on enemy known to be in area and any unlocated enemy units.
- .Obtain and distribute maps in accordance with FM 101-10, as pertains to airborne.
- .Prepare sand table of DZ's and assembly areas and schedule briefings of battalion and special unit CO's and their staff.
- .Prepare terrain analysis of target areas in conjunction with engineer study.
- .Prepare intelligence estimate of enemy capabilities with his possible and probable actions.
- .Prepare Intelligence Annex to Operation Order.
- .Maintain situation map.
- .Prepare daily brief for CO.
- .Promulgate and enforce security regulations.
- .Prepare and distribute target lists.
- .Prepare and distribute intelligence collection plan.
- .Prepare and distribute information on current enemy tactics and equipment.

16. Technology helped to give the 187th RCT a marked advantage over the North Koreans. The technological level of the organic weapons of both forces was

essentially equal. The great advantage that the 187th RCT had was air superiority. This air superiority not only permitted the airborne operation to be conducted in the first place, but also allowed the Air Force to provide very effective close air support and uninterrupted resupply to the Regiment. Additionally, on the third day (22 October), a tank company with the reinforcements (27th BDE), shocked, demoralized, and helped rout the 239th North Koreans Regiment that was engaging the 3rd Battalion south of Sukchon. (The North Koreans had no tanks).

V. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ACTION.

A. The purpose of this section is to convey the significance of the Sukchon-Sunchon Operation and to evoke a clearer understanding of what the battle meant and what it can teach. In order to gain from this battle analysis the battle must be considered from both its strengths and its weaknesses.

B. This battle occurred as part of a major U.N. counter-offensive—the Campaign of Pursuit of the North Korean Army in the fall of 1950. It was part of MacArthur's overall Plan to complete the destruction of the North Korean Army. The battle, however, was not a decisive battle; it can hardly be termed vital to the overall success of the pursuit to the Yalu. Further, the 187th RCT failed in its missions to rescue U.N. and to capture Korean government officials. What then were the values of the operation? What were the short and long range lessons learned? Have other operations been patterned after it?

C. First, the high quality combat effectiveness of the American soldier/paratrooper was vividly demonstrated. The 187th RCT engaged some 6,000 enemy tropps, killed an estimated 2,764, and captured 3,818. Their own casualties were 45 jump injuries and 65 battle caulties.¹¹⁴ Their capability to rapidly adjust in a fluid situation remains a standard to emulate in today's units. The type of enviroment experienced by the 187th RCT during its planning and operations serves as a model for staff planning today. Leadership, training, experience, and discipline were responsible for this high quality showing. Leadership by example, courage, and experience exhibited by Colonel Bowen were certainly contributing factors. The rigorous training program that the regiment had undergone since training at Camp Campbell, Kentucky and even when in a Combat Zone in Korea honed teamwork and combat skills to a fine edge. Detailed checklists and SOP's are indicators of both quality training and documenting lessons learned.

D. Much of the success of this operation can be attributed to a long standing relationship between the 314th Troop Carrier Group and the 187th RCT. The 314th had been stationed at Sewart AFB, Tennessee, 50 miles from Fort Campbell, and had regularly supported and trained with the 11th Airborne Division.¹¹⁵ This aspect certainly underscores the importance of habitual supporting relationships and standardization.

E. This operation, brilliantly planned and executed, showed the usefulness of the airborne force.¹¹⁶ The element of surprise was achieved. Further, this was the first heavy equipment drop in combat. All equipment organic to an airborne infantry regiment was dropped, including 3/4 ton trucks, 90mm towed anti-tank guns, 105mm howitzers, and a special mobile radio transmission set, the equivalent in weight of a 2 1/2 ton truck. Additionally, this battle was the first time that C-119 aircraft were used in a combat parachute operation.

F. The airborne drop at Sukchon and Sunchon was designed to cut off a badly disorganized and retreating army and to annihilate the remnants of their forces. This was part of the continued effort to use American strengths (technology, organization, materiel, and leadership) to strike against the enemy's weaknesses. In keeping touch with past experience in the indirect approach to war, such as island hopping in WW II and the Inchon amphibious assault, MacArthur continued to apply pressure on the North Koreans by maintaining momentum and initiative. While the actual enactment of the mission proved almost flawless, a combination of factors such as a lack of sophisticated intelligence collection, poor communications, and the effect of bad weather thwarted efforts to capture high ranking North Koreans and to liberate large numbers of US Prisoners of War.

G. This operation suggests that surprise can still be achieved on the modern battlefield. Further, such surprise is a vital part of current US doctrine and it complements the effective use of combat power to win battles. This operation,

however, further suggests that airborne operations must be precisely planned and and must complement the overall commander's intent. The airborne planner though, must be cognizant of the "frictions" or war which will cause numerous changes in original plans as experienced by the 187th Regimental Combat Team.

H. Future trends for the Airborne units were effected by this operation. One other airborne operation took place during the Korean War. On 23 March 1951, the 187th RCT, reinforced with two Ranger Companies, dropped at Munsan-ni behind the North Korean 19th Division. Again, strategic surprise was achieved. As a result of Korean airborne successes, XVIII Abn Corps was brought back to life at Ft Bragg, North Carolina¹¹⁷ and the requirement for more tactical airlift was illustrated. The Air Force required an "advanced, all-purpose, workhorse type, aerial vehicle, that could go anyplace, anytime, without elaborate facilities or equipment preparations."¹¹⁸ Further, Lockheed began work and design on the C-130, first flown in 1954.

I. Actual combat orders were simple and concise, however, detailed annexes were prepared and used. Following the initial phase, much was left to the initiative of the leaders on the ground. The Regimental orders lacked details on the link-up operation which is considered to be one of the most difficult and complex operations to perform.

J. Today, we can learn from the close and cooperative involvement of the media experience in this operation. Airborne-qualified reporters, whose participation was encouraged and supported, accompanied the assault. Colonel Bowen, the Regimental Commander, held a press conference on 12 October for the four correspondents normally attached to his regiment and the three additional reporters who would cover the operation. After briefing these correspondents on the upcoming operation, he swore them to secrecy. Practice jumps were arranged, and reporters

jumped with the paratroopers.¹¹⁹ During the air drop a C-47 loaded with reporters circled the DZ for hours allowing an eye-witness view of the operation.

K. This paper has surfaced a number of issues worthy of further investigation. First, impact of the number of WW II combat veterans in the regiment would be an interesting topic for future research. Second, another issue worthy of further study is the handling of enemy POW's in an airborne operation in enemy territory. Control and evacuation of POWs in this type of situation is important for all future airborne operations owing to resource consumption.

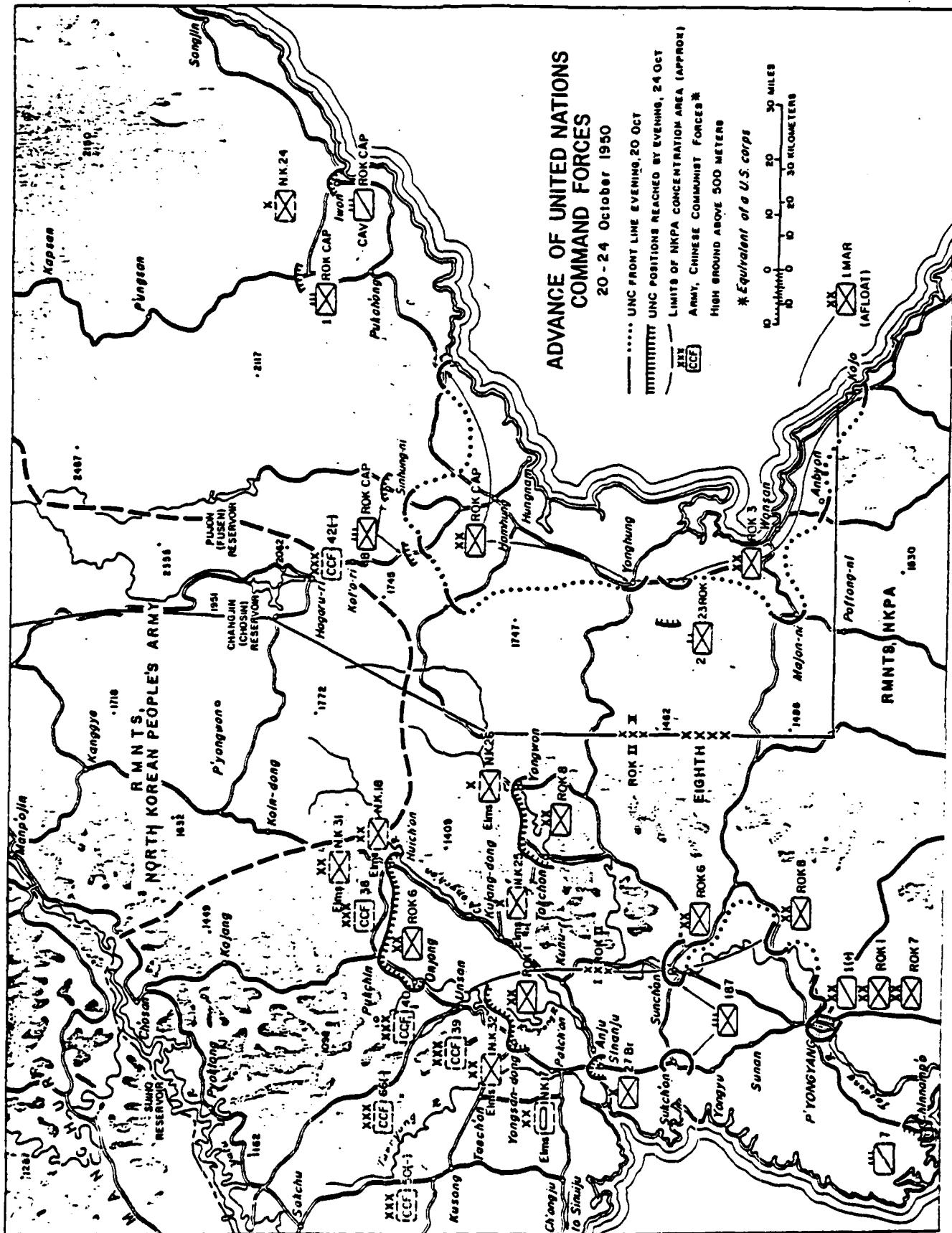
L. Few major problems surfaced in the after-action reports. Does this mean there were none? Were there training deficiencies? Could lives have been saved through improvement in rehearsals, jump equipment, training (individual, collective, and leadership), orders that were issued, command and control, logistics support, communications, medical support, weapons or other equipment, or finally discipline? Asked another way, what was the effectiveness of each of these essential elements? The importance of balanced after action reports for the purpose of learning from mistakes and failures, as well as reinforcing success, is underscored.

M. A number of the aspects of this operation have application to today's Air Land Battle doctrine. The operation has many similarities to the Deep Attack and associated planning and training considerations.

N. The numerous small unit attacks incurred by combat, combat support, and combat service support units implied a need for significant additions in both training and weapon deployment. Repeatedly men in these organizations, whether combat arms soldiers or logisticians had to engage in heavy, close fighting. Parallels can be drawn between the 187th RCT's experience in 1950 and the expected volume and intensity of small unit attacks, in both division and corps rear areas of the modern battlefield.

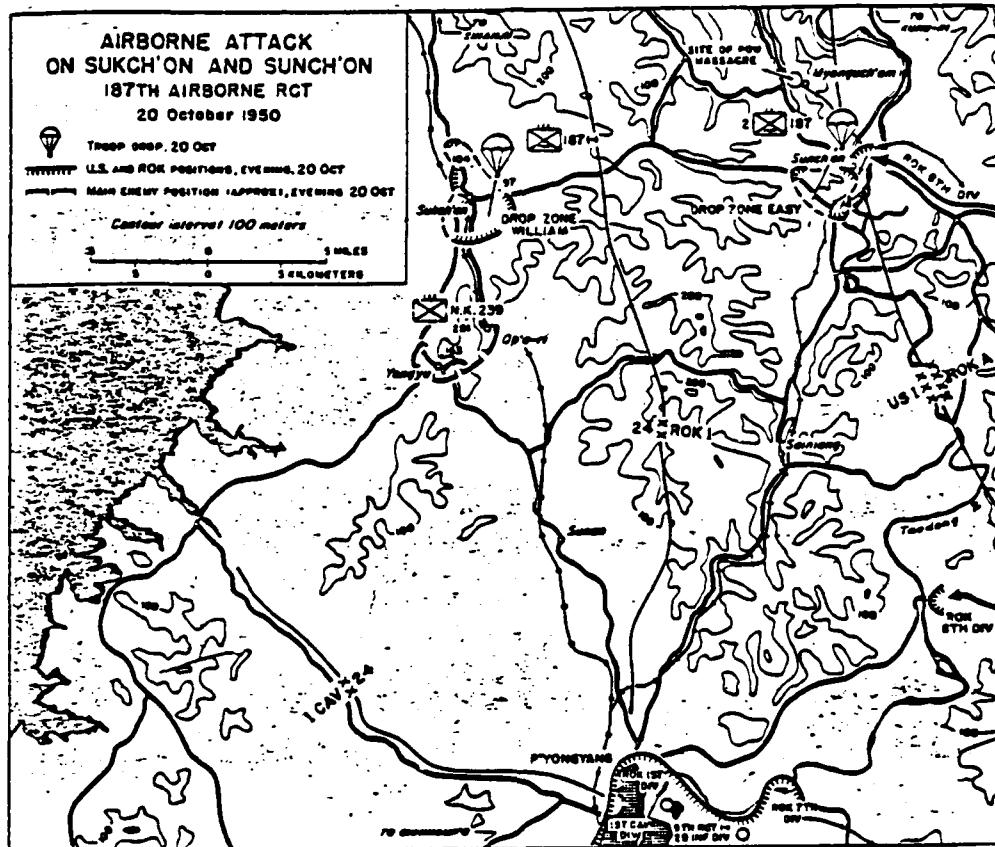
O. The airborne communications problems experienced and documented so vividly by the 187th RCT strongly suggest the need to ensure that our airborne forces have adequate communications. These communications problems, identified in lessons learned, offer ample room for reflection. First, our communication equipment is still not interoperable with our allies, e.g., French, Germans, British to the extent needed to successfully conduct combat operations. Second, although the message about the importance of communications problems was foremost in the minds of those participating in the operation, communications needed to control action on the modern battlefield continue to be a critically important problem. Third, airborne operations must have communications. Even with the advent of higher technology such as satellite relay, these efforts can only be categorized as inadequate. While the 187th RCT faced an infantry force, airborne operations in support of Airland battle doctrine could face a dangerously sophisticated enemy. The units today cannot afford the luxury of discussing the problem in after action reports.

P. This operation is certainly a battle worthy of study. It abounds with examples of leadership, planning unit cohesiveness, high state of training, and the fighting spirit of the American soldier. It has application to airborne operations as well as ground tactics using the Air Land Battle doctrine of today.



Map No. 2

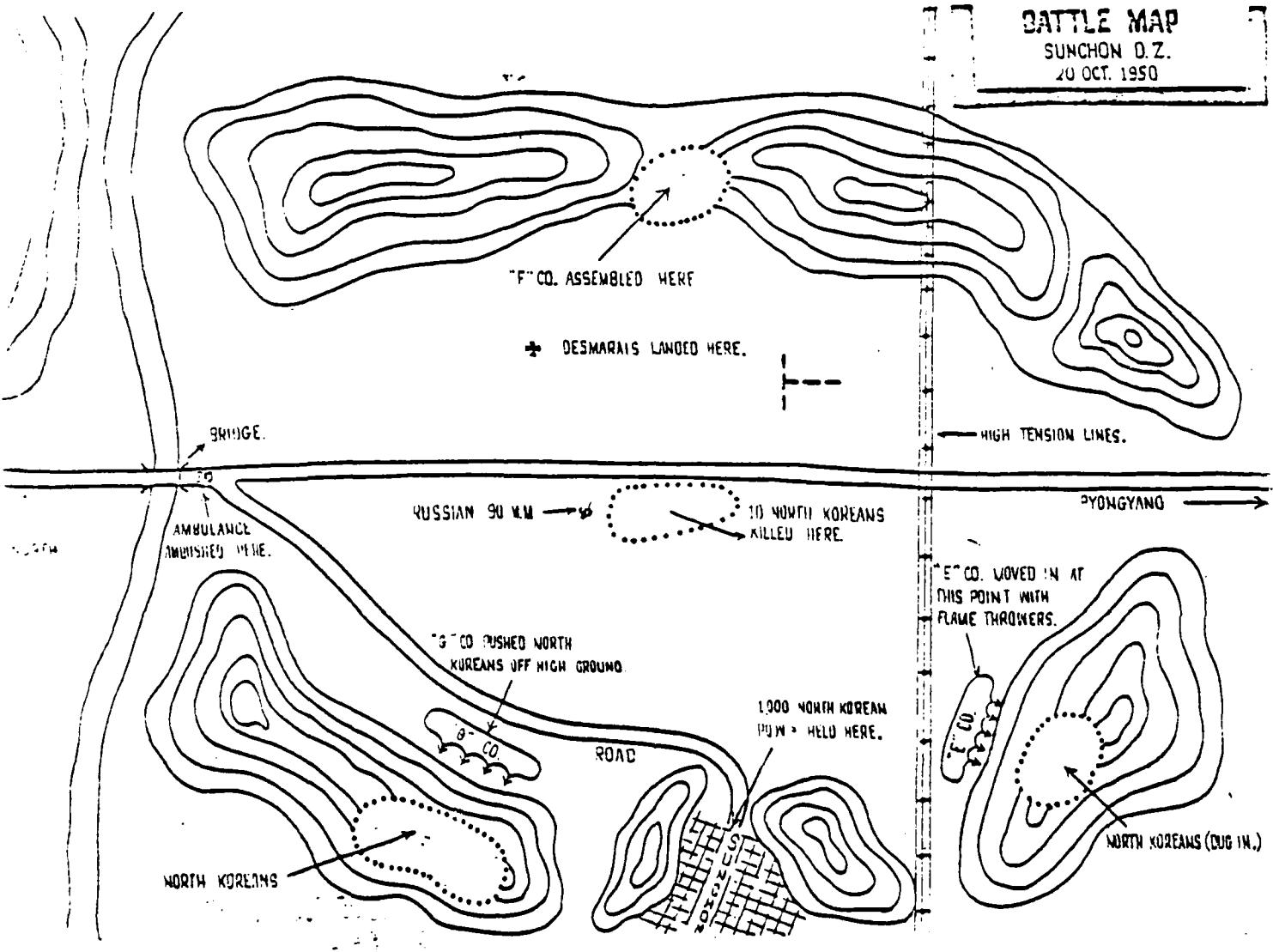
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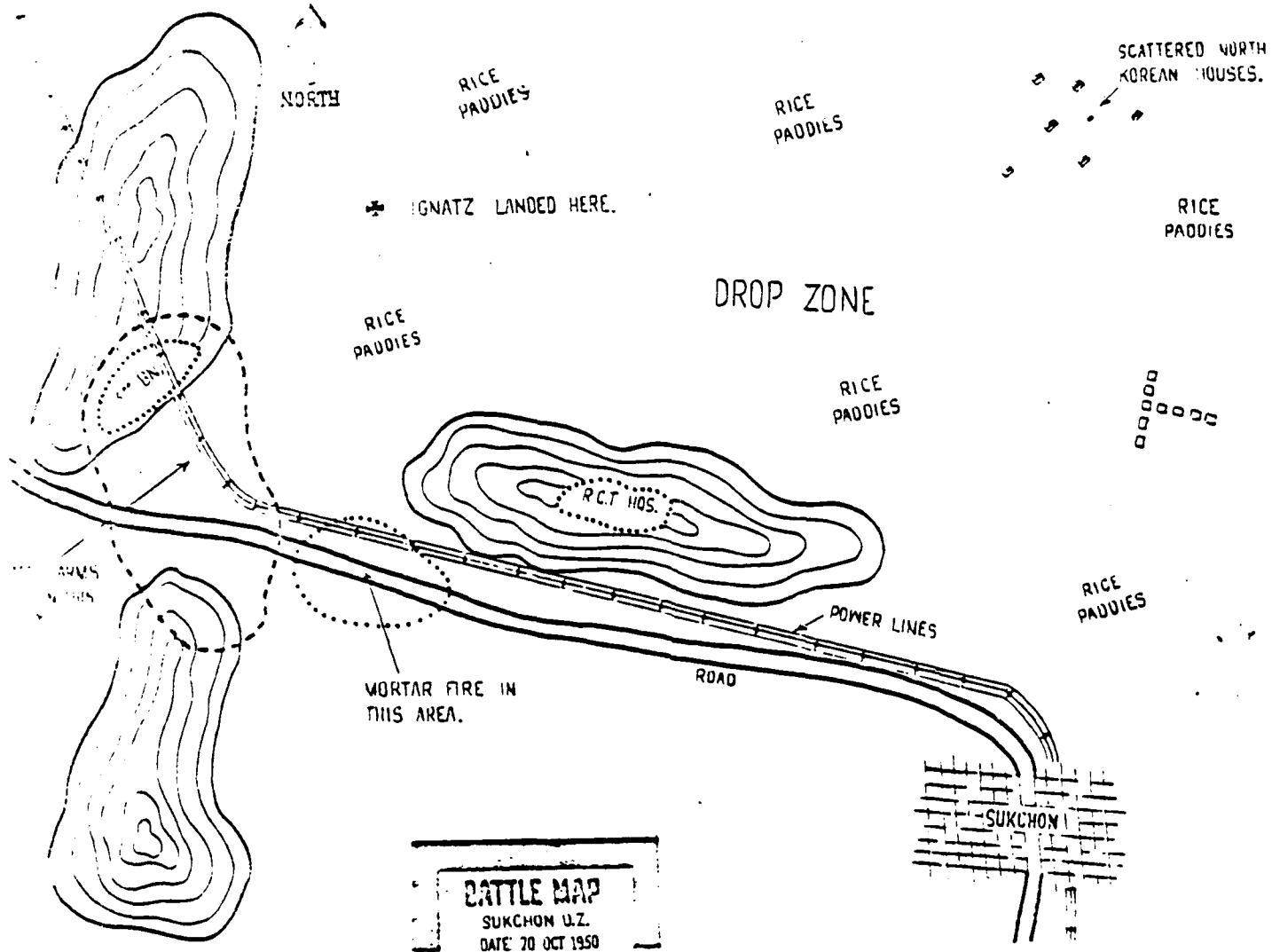
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BATTLE MAP
SUNCHON D.Z.
20 OCT. 1950



Map No. 4

"Battle Map: Sunchon DZ, 20 October 1950". U.S. Army, 187th Regimental Combat Team; Nashville, Tennessee. RAKKASAN Club, 1956.



Map No. 5

"Battle Map: Sukchon DZ, 20 October 1950". U.S. Army, 187th Regimental Combat Team, Nashville, Tennessee. RAKKASAN Club, 1956.

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